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Pilot Study about Online Collaborative Work in a Large Size English Class

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Research Report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in  
English Language Teaching – Autonomous Learning Environments

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### **Declaration**

We hereby declare that our research report entitled:

Pilot Study about Online Collaborative Work in a Large Size English Class

- Is the result of our own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared and specified in the text;
- Is neither substantially the same as nor contains substantial portions of any similar work submitted or that is being concurrently submitted for any degree or diploma or other qualification at the Universidad de La Sabana or any other university or similar institution except as declared and specified in the text;
- Complies with the word limits and other requirements stipulated by the Research Subcommittee of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures;
- Has been submitted by or on the required submission date.

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Signature:

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is for Diana Lucía Bernal Cubillos, featuring a large, stylized 'D' and 'B'. The signature on the right is for Yesenia Moreno Heredia, with a more fluid, cursive style.

### **Acknowledgements**

First, we thank God, our source of peace and comfort, to be our guide and to have gifted us with the privilege of cultivate our understanding in order to serve our community. Besides, we would like to gratefully acknowledge our families and friends who have been supporting us on recent years through the struggles and difficulties presented as we have worked in this research project. Also, our gratitude is extended to our professors who constantly encouraged us to give our best in each stage of this enriching academic process, devoting their time to discussion and reflection. It was an honor to be part of your apprentices. Finally, we would like to thank the Academic Coordinator and the Department's Director to be supportive, and leadership models for us.

### **Abstract**

This pilot study followed a Design Based Research approach, implemented in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia. The study aimed at determining the role of online collaborative work on reading and writing English language skills progress in a large size English class. To determine such progress, an online collaborative instructional design through the Moodle platform was implemented. This design was focused on collaborative tasks and the forum participation in the online environment. This report followed a mixed method where the analysis of the students' individual and collaborative participations in forums, teachers and students' journals, pre/post- test, among other data, suggested that the writing and reading skills were enhanced by the strategy, although the online collaborative work did not reach the expected level of interaction. Additionally, the design motivated learners to participate in the implementation, making them feel involved and attracted to English language learning.

Key words: *collaborative learning, collaborative learning online, Large size class, Instructional Design.*

### **Resumen**

El presente estudio siguió un enfoque de Investigación Basada en el Diseño en un colegio público de Bogotá, Colombia. Este estudio buscó determinar el rol del trabajo colaborativo en línea en el progreso de las habilidades de lectura y escritura en inglés, en clases con grupos grandes de estudiantes. Para determinar el progreso que tuvieron las habilidades de escritura y lectura en los estudiantes de grado noveno, se implementó un Diseño Instruccional Colaborativo en línea a través de la plataforma Moodle. Este diseño se enfocó en trabajos colaborativos y participación en foros del ambiente en línea. Este reporte siguió el método mixto donde el análisis de las participaciones individuales y colaborativas de los estudiantes en los foros, los diarios de estudiantes y profesores, el pre test y el post test, entre otros datos, sugirieron que las habilidades de lectura y escritura fueron beneficiadas gracias a la estrategia, aunque el trabajo colaborativo en línea no obtuvo el nivel esperado de interacción. Adicionalmente, el diseño motivó a los estudiantes a participar en las lecciones, haciéndolos sentir involucrados y atraídos al aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa.

*Palabras clave: aprendizaje colaborativo, el aprendizaje colaborativo en línea, grupos grandes, diseño instruccional.*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the study**

Nowadays, education has an important place in Colombia. This is visible in the coverage and investment that has been increasing year per year. One of the educational programs that the Colombian government has been promoting is the National Bilingualism Program that is aligned with the standards proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference. The objective of this policy is basically to educate Colombian citizens to be able to communicate in English under international standards. Hence, this policy is mainly aimed at enhancing the Colombian economy and cultural openness within a globalized world, in a specific period of time beginning in 2004 until 2019. In order to achieve this objective, the Ministry of Education created the Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages that guide English teaching at primary and high school institutions (2006). However, there are some problematic situations which have not been considered in the implementation of this national program, such as the large size classes in public schools.

With this in mind, large size class is an important factor to consider when each classroom

has about 35-45 or more students per class, taking into account that there are almost 9 million of students distributed in 12,845 public schools in Colombia (Suarez, 2015). This number of learners becomes a factor that often impedes the proper assessment of learners' performance. As a consequence, teachers experience obstacles providing feedback and support when assessing students' individual foreign language learning process.

Considering the problem of the large size in Colombian public high schools, this pilot study intends to inform readers about the implementation of a collaborative work online

strategy when working on English reading and writing skills in ninth grade students between 15 and 17 years old at the public school Colegio Saludcoop Sur, in Bogotá. This online strategy sought to facilitate the situation of large size groups through interaction among students by participating in small group projects. Additionally, the easy access to learners' development of activities on the online platform sought effective teacher's monitoring of each learner. Finally, the online strategy explored students reading and writing progress due to proposal of the instructional design.

### **Rationale**

Large size class is a common factor from public schools in Bogotá which may have some effects on the learning and teaching process. Some of those are related to the time devoted to giving and receiving feedback, the time teachers use for monitoring their students' performance, the opportunities students have to participate in class, which makes high achievers stand out, among others. In the particular case of the language teaching context, this issue might affect the development of skills and competences. As a result, looking for pedagogical alternatives that allow teachers and students to deal with this aspect becomes a great opportunity for teachers-researchers.

With this in mind, the researchers considered that collaborative work online could be a strategy to improve English language learning due to learning online environments may increase the exposure students have to the language, fostering the development of the different foreign language skills and competences. Additionally, taking into account that most of the standardized tests require specific reading and writing skills, for instance, SABER 11 (a

national standardized exam presented at the end of the secondary school level), the researchers decided to focus on those two skills.

Having in mind the previous information, this pilot study intends to design an online collaborative work strategy that meets the learners' needs, and help teachers include technology in English language classes in order to provide a meaningful learning environment. In addition, this strategy can provide diverse resources that respond to the different learning styles students have, and also, to help teachers give appropriate feedback to learners. Besides, it is expected that the proposal fits the English language school curriculum goals that respond to “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés” (MEN<sup>2</sup>, 2006). Moreover, the results of this pilot study offer might be implemented in bigger contexts in public schools in Bogotá, providing possible alternatives to deal with the issue of large size classes in English language teaching.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Saludcoop Sur School curriculum for ninth grade is based on The Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages (MEN, 2006), where students of ninth grade should reach a B1.1 proficiency level. This means that a student of ninth grade with this level should be able to read and understand simple narrative and argumentative texts. Students should write simple descriptions, talk about their daily activities and preferences, and understand general ideas when another person is speaking in English.

However, the aforementioned issue about large size classes is one of the factors that has affected the English language learning process from being consistent with the school's

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<sup>2</sup> MEN. National Ministry of Education

curricular objectives. The reasons for this statement are based on what the teacher-researchers have observed and reflected upon their teaching context in public schools. As a result, they started thinking about a pedagogical alternative to minimize the effects of large size groups on learning. In order to refine their proposal, the researchers decided to carry out a needs analysis survey that allowed them to inquire about the students' needs and preferences when approaching the English language.

According to the needs analysis results, students from 902 class in Saludcoop Sur public school considered that they presented difficulties reading, writing simple sentences, understanding instructions and acquiring vocabulary. Furthermore, 902 students considered that learning English is important in order to have a good job position or to explore new cultures, but they did not use it as part of their daily lives; therefore, they did not feel involved with the language use. On the other hand, the fact that the 34 ninth graders only have 110 minutes of English class per week, is a factor that affects the exposure time they have to the language, as well as the monitoring and assessment processes teachers should have with each student language learning process. Additionally, most students expressed they like to work in groups thanks to the support their classmates offer to achieve learning goals. One final result from the needs analysis showed that students use diverse technological tools such as e-mail, chats, or forums in order to exchange information with their classmates. Nevertheless, the time they usually spend on the web is mostly for chatting, playing games, watching videos, and listening to music.

Having the previous results in mind, the researchers posed the following research questions:

**General Research Question**

What is the role of a collaborative online strategy on reading and writing foreign language skills progress in a large size English class?

Sub-Question: What are students' perceptions of the online collaborative instructional design proposed for the English class?

**General Objective**

- To determine the role (function) a collaborative online strategy has on reading and writing in a large size English class.

**Specific Objectives**

- To design a collaborative online strategy for teaching reading and writing skills in English.
- To analyze the role of the proposed online strategy on students' collaborative work.
- To observe the students' participation in the reading and writing activities during the implementation of the online strategy in order to assess their progress.
- To analyze the students' perceptions of the online collaborative instructional design proposed for their English class.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the online collaborative instructional design as a methodological possibility to teach English.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework**

This section focuses on discussing the constructs related to this research project: collaborative learning, collaborative work online, instructional design. First, some previous studies carried out on the topics addressed by this research are presented. Then, different theoretical viewpoints are discussed regarding each one of the constructs underlying this research project on the implementation of a strategy to address writing and reading skills in a large size English class through collaboration online.

### **State of the Art**

Different studies have been carried out about collaborative learning, online collaborative learning, large size classes and technology use in the educational setting. Here, some recent studies regarding such topics are discussed.

To start with, the relation between collaborative learning and large size class is addressed by Kerr (2011). According to the author, large size class deals with the maintenance of quality in learning and teaching, taking into account that it has demonstrated negative effects on learning; for instance, students feel anonymous and isolated from the class. With this in mind, Kerr developed a study to describe the possible approaches that helped diminish the negative aspects of large size classes. In this case, collaborative learning was considered to increase learners' feeling of value in large size environment. However, for collaborative learning to be effective, learners must be committed to their own learning process. In essence, the study provided possible approaches such as collaborative learning to face the problem of large size class in educational settings, as a possibility to improve the quality of teaching and learning in classes with those characteristics.



There have also been studies that have inquired about online collaborative learning in language learning settings. To begin with, Warschauer (1997) carried out a research project in order to explore the nature of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in the language classroom taken as basis sociocultural learning theories, as well as to examine possibilities for promoting collaborative language learning when including CMC in the classroom. The author states that the interactions happening in CMC become a powerful tool for constructing knowledge from the perspective of sociocultural learning theories. In fact, the author concludes that having a better understanding of the theoretical aspects related to CMC might help language learning classroom practices improve.

Moreover, Tyrou and Mikros (n.d.) intended to assess the impact of online collaborative learning in second language acquisition with first year Greek students, by means of the construction of collaborative learning online environments using wikis. The study concluded that comprehension of the second language and creative writing benefit from the online collaborative interaction. In addition, team support helped learners to develop tasks by encouraging their classmates to advance with the activities. Furthermore, linguistic and cultural dimensions of second language increased thanks to the frequent use of the target language while learners carried out the collaborative tasks. To summarize, the implementation of a collaborative online strategy showed to be learning supportive and valuable to progress in ESL writing skills, through the use of wikis.

Similarly, Choi (2008) carried out a study about the role of online collaboration in an ESL writing context. This research was carried out in a community college in Hong Kong with 36 students. It consisted of using online collaborative learning in writing tasks, where learners gave written feedback to their peers in order to improve their texts. This study concluded that

the online learning environment promoted the completion of the written tasks by fostering learners' motivation to write, particularly, when learners became aware of the audience. Besides, the results shown through the online component, demonstrated that such component was supportive and produced positive emotional effects when interacting with classmates. Thus, the comprehension of the effects of online collaborative learning on reading motivation in the second language, would increase the awareness of the benefits when using these kinds of strategies in second language teaching environments.

Regarding the inclusion of technological tools in the language classroom, a technology-based collaborative project (Ho, 2000) in two schools in Singapore and Birmingham (UK) was found. The purpose of this study was to explore diverse writing tasks for different purposes and types of audiences by exchanging information electronically. In this research, the author found that the inclusion of technological tools in the language classroom can develop learners' confidence on their own skills and motivations, which has a direct impact on students' language skills development. Moreover, the use of that online tool allowed students learning about people from different cultural backgrounds. The author discussed how the use of technological tools promotes the shift in the teacher's traditional roles into a guide, due to the active participation learners have on online environments.

With respect to the use of technological learning environments such as Moodle, the researchers found a study carried out in 2016 by Eskandari and Soleimani in Iran. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of using the Moodle environment on the learning of specific English grammatical components in Iranian EFL learners. After implementing this strategy in a control and experimental group, the authors stated that Moodle showed great

potential for supporting conventional classroom instruction. Also, they found that although the two groups did not show statistical differences in their learning of grammar, the experimental group showed a positive attitude towards using Moodle as a tool for receiving instruction. Also, the author concluded that using environments such as Moodle offers learners opportunities for being more aware of time management and distance learning characteristics.

Now, the theoretical discussion on the main constructs for this research are presented in the following session.

## **Literature Review**

**Collaborative learning.** Collaborative learning cannot be disconnected from the concept of cognitive and social constructivism coined by Vygotsky (1978). When thinking about collaboration in learning, the idea of the social dimension appears when the subject communicates knowledge and experiences that can be constructed through the interaction with other subjects. Then, this new knowledge can lead to the achievement of a co-constructed outcome (Vizgirdaite & Juceviciene, 2014).

Likewise, Dooly (2008) considers that:

Collaboration entails the whole process of learning. This may include students teaching one another, students teaching the teacher, and of course the teacher teaching the students, too. More importantly, it means students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own and that reaching the goal implies that students have helped each other to understand and learn (p. 21).

For this author, knowledge is also constructed, and transformed by students where teachers have an important role too.

In order to expand this definition, Dillenbourg (1999) explains that the process of learning in collaborative work concerns four aspects: a situation, the interactions, process and effects.

- The situation refers to people in the group have more or less the same knowledge and can perform the same actions, they have a common goal, and they work together.
- The interaction is given when learners influence the peers' cognitive processes based on three criteria: interactivity, synchronicity and negotiability. The term synchronicity gives the opportunity to do something together, and negotiation allows people not to impose points of view or ideas.
- The process of collaborative work is also called internalization process where students transfer and construct new knowledge through the social interactions.
- The effects measure conceptual changes and benefits from the learning process.

These four characteristics do not guarantee collaboration when learning in a collaborative work environment; on the contrary, they only set the scene for collaboration to happen. For this reason, it is also important to explain how to plan and facilitate collaborative learning in a classroom from another perspective that has the following aspects: promoting collaborative interaction, designing collaborative tasks, and building collaborative structures (Watkins, 2007).

The first aspect is promoting collaborative interaction, which takes place when the group thinks together and acts helpfully in the design of a task through the interaction (Watkins, et. al., 2007). It means that “the interaction leads students to a point of reflection that causes discussion, integration and new knowledge. Its purpose is to respond to the learner in a way intended to change his or her behavior towards an educational goal” (Wagner, 1994, as cited in

Buzzetto-More, 2007, p. 84). In order not to get confused about what interaction actually means, Buzzetto-More (2007) suggests that “interaction, as expressed by one participant, is nothing more than the exchange of information. The suggestion here is: effective learning requires reflection and validation, reflection and validation require interaction and therefore effective learning requires interaction” (p. 86). In fact, to guarantee collaboration, interaction becomes a key element to reach effective learning in group work.

The second aspect is designing collaborative tasks on the basis of collaborative work aims. With respect to this, Cohen (1992, as cited in Watkins, et. al, 2007 p. 92) states that when a teacher designs collaborative tasks, those tasks must allow each member of the group to search for information and explore resources individually while the others engage in different activities that are oriented towards the same goal. As a result, the group should have the chance to negotiate, communicate, and interchange the ideas and information they have all gathered, in order to reach agreements and complete the task.

The third aspect has to do with building collaborative structures. Indeed, the structures of collaborative work need to set a class environment in which students follow a path from the individual to the collaborative work in order to create a final product (Watkins et al., 2007).

Having in mind the previous information, for this research project, the term collaborative learning is understood as a mechanism of teaching and learning where deduction, induction, compilation and other reasoning skills are visible when teamed-students create or construct a meaningful task from the building of their own individual knowledge to look for understanding, meaning and discussing significant experiences.

Collaborative learning can be used in many different educational contexts and environments maintaining the same theoretical foundations. However, there are some

specificities the collaborative learning online has that will be discussed in the following construct.

**Collaborative learning online.** The practice of effective collaborative learning in a face to face classroom is also possible in online classrooms. However, the difference between both environments lies mainly in the nature of some dynamics that happen in a regular classroom regarding class management, types of tasks and activities, teacher-student and student-student interactions, among others.

While both strategies, online and face to face collaborative learning, have the same principles and multiple common features, online collaborative learning proposes some challenges that Graham and Misanchuk (2004) classified in three main issues. Those issues will be observed during the data analysis process based on the information such data provide.

***Creating groups.*** Group formation in online collaborative environments deals with two challenges:

- Choosing appropriate group size: Although there is not an ideal number of group members, Graham & Misanchuk (2004) suggest that a reduced number of participants is more effective for learning, in other words, the smaller the better. The communicative process takes longer in online strategies and the coordination of the team members' schedules and availability becomes difficult. Besides, the multiple points of view coming from the different group members can make the agreement on task development problematic.
- Determining group composition: while homogeneity of the group members makes the team more cohesive thanks to the common background, heterogeneity enriches the

learning with the different variety of experiences; however, it can cause conflicts due to the wide and diverse perspectives of the participants.

***Structuring the learning activities.*** This feature refers to two aspects:

- Establishing an Appropriate Level of Interdependence: “Interdependence is defined as the level of dependence that one group member has on other group members, in order to complete the learning tasks” Higher interdependence promotes collaborative learning because learners’ co-construction of knowledge implies the participation and agreement of all group members.
- Creating Learner Accountability. This issue is influenced by the assessment structure of the proposal, but it has to be balanced at both, individual and group accountability to avoid free-riding.

***Facilitating group interaction.*** Promoting group interaction allows learners to participate and interact in an online environment. This aspect is considered a relevant component in an effective online collaborative learning environment, due to the exchanging of information and co-creation of knowledge.

- Developing Cooperative Group Skills: “Students who have developed cooperative group skills are more likely to gain from their collaborative learning experience than others” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999 as cited in Graham & Misanchuk, 2004, p. 195). Some of those skills are related to positive feedback received from other learners, negotiation to reach consensus, and communication.

Among these features communication in the online environment is a fundamental element that must be considered when proposing the collaborative online learning. Having in mind that communication differs from the face to face communicative process, it supposes a

new experience for learners where they discuss, share and conclude activities through this environment. That is why learners need to agree on the time and manner of using tools such as chats, forums, email, etc., depending on the access and availability of the group members. In addition, Graham and Misanchuk (2004) refer to “communicating the unseen”. This aspect of group communicative processes describes the unseen presence of a member that may be involved in the task by reading and observing the process in the online environment, but does not write with frequency and is perceived as uninterested. This is not a problem on the face to face learning, where the presence of a learner is perceived through the gestures and postures (non-verbal) as a sign of participation in group work.

Additionally, there are some phases (Graham & Misanchuk, 2004) that can be used to design lessons that incorporate collaborative online environments. Taking into account that the current research project includes a collaborative online environment for an English class, those phases are taken into consideration at the moment of designing the online environment. The first phase is geared towards creating the environment which intends to prepare students for the collaborative work that will be expected from them. Also, during this phase the students are informed about the importance of collaborative work and about the place where they will meet online (e.g., Moodle). The second stage aims at modelling the process. For this purpose, it is important that the instructor shows commitment to the learning process by modelling collaborative behavior in the course. The third stage focuses on guiding the process in which the instructor supports his or her responsibility towards the collaborative learning process taking place in the course. As a result, students will be aware of how the instructor is going to be involved in the collaborative activities taking place in the course. Finally, the fourth stage is



to evaluate the process. Here, the teacher evaluates the process by providing students with assessment upon the completion of a collaborative activity or an event (Palloff, 2004).

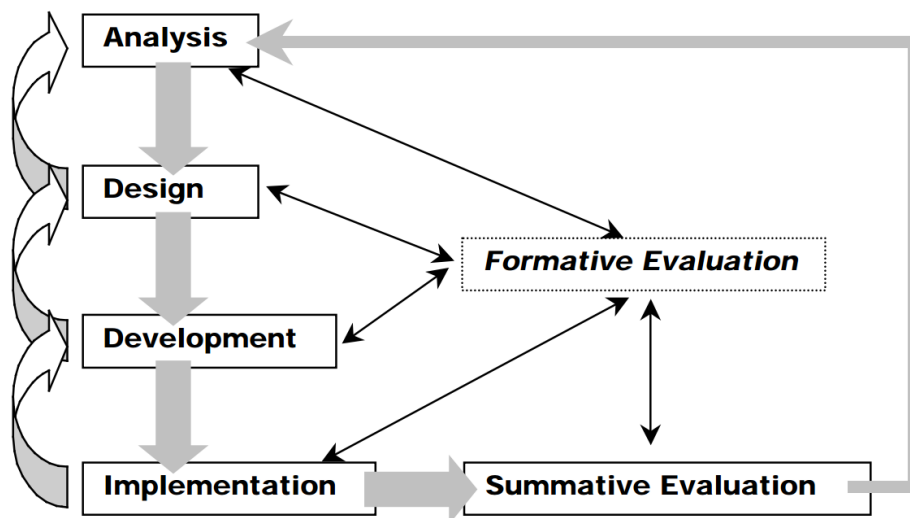
**Large size classes.** Without any doubt, large size groups have an impact on the learning processes in the classroom. Thus, the number of students in a class has the potential to affect how much is learned in a number of different ways: students might get distracted easily and they do not feel comfortable with the activities they do not understand. As a consequence, students may create indiscipline in the class as a result of the lack of interest, autonomy, and self-confidence (Ehrenberg, 2001).

In addition, in a language classroom, Norton & Locastro (2001) affirm that “with a group of more than 15, it is difficult to give all the learners chances to practice the target language” (p. 495). Thus, they illustrate three aspects affected in large classes when students are learning a language: pedagogical, management-related, and affective aspects. Firstly, the pedagogical category is affected because students have difficulties when carrying out speaking, reading, and writing tasks, due to the teachers’ difficulty to monitor students’ work or provide feedback. Therefore, it is difficult to get a satisfactory knowledge of students’ needs. Secondly, the management-related process that reflects the tremendous effort that the teacher has to make when revising and assessing tests, tasks, among others, which make measuring effectiveness difficult. Besides, something that may constitute a challenge for teachers is the noise level because when it is high, it impacts the organizing, planning and presenting of lessons, as well as neighboring classes. Thirdly, the affective aspect is affected by the impossibility to assess students' interests and moods or help them with skills development when they have difficulties.

**Instructional design.** Instructional design (ID, hereafter) is defined by Smith & Ragan, (1999) as “a systematic and reflective process of translating certain principles of learning and

instruction into plans for instructional materials, activities, information resources, and evaluation” (p. 2). Thus, the instructional design is a process for constructing instructional material based on certain principles that will take into consideration the learning styles and aspects such as the cognitive or the behavioral, in order to fulfill all the needs and expectations that learners have when they participate in an activity.

In addition, Gustafson & Branch (2007) provided a definition of ID as “a system of procedures for developing education and training programs in a consistent and reliable fashion” (p.17), where, Instructional Design is conceived as a “complex process that is creative, active and iterative” (p.17). The benefits of instructional design rely on using it as a system of procedures to guide the planning instruction which includes interaction and coordination as components of the activities (Gustafson & Branch, 2002). Furthermore, these authors define the main characteristics of ID which become the foundations of this process: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation -ADDIE- (Gustafson & Branch, 2002). The ADDIE Model is represented in figure 1.



*Figure 1.* ADDIE model. This figure presents the phases of an instructional design process. Taken from: McGriff, (2000).

Gustafson and Branch (2002) propose some features of an ID constructed on the basis of an ADDIE model. It should be: learner-centered, goal-oriented, focused on real-world performance, focused on outcomes that can be measured in a reliable and valid way, empirical, and aimed at team effort.

Thus, for the purpose of this study, the researchers adopted some of the previous characteristics proposed by Gustafson and Branch (2002) to guide and support the design for this research project. Hence, each one of those features is discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

First, the design should be learner-centered in order to focalize instructions on students' learning and goal achievement, instead of focusing on teaching praxis. The design proposed in this study is set up in a virtual environment, where the instruction and tasks are focused on the learning not on the teaching. Therefore, this proposal focuses on students' participation, autonomy, and performance.

Second, the ID has to be goal-oriented. That is why designers should state clear objectives of the proposal that permit an effective implementation. To establish the goals for the present proposal, according to the ADDIE model (Gustafson & Branch, 2002), the designers' first step was to assess learners' needs and analyzed the learners' context to determine the goals of the design. Having this in mind, designers carried out a needs analysis that allowed researchers to set goals to respond to learners' demands and to study their preferences to guide the construction of learning activities, tasks and materials.

Third, ID focuses on real-world performance. Thus, in order for goals to be effective, they should be contextualized, they must make learners reflect on their environment and provide activities that allow students to apply their acquired knowledge in their real context.

This means that the tasks should be meaningful and related to their real world, consequently, learning becomes meaningful. Based on Gustafson and Branch (2002), who establish that focusing on real-world performance is considered a characteristic to be present in an ID, the activities proposed in this design simulates possible situations in which students could use the language acquired.

Finally, the ID is conceived as a team effort where different individuals may contribute from their specific areas of knowledge: designers, technicians, subject matter experts, project managers, computer programmers among others. The integration of different professionals gives more support to make the design efficient and attractive, particularly when the virtual environment demands computing assistance on the tool and management of components like graphics, interfaces, among others. In the specific case of this project, the Moodle platform provided by Universidad de La Sabana, was used as the tool to upload the lessons for the pedagogical implementation. In order to do that, Universidad de La Sabana ICT professionals trained the researchers on student registration and the management of the platform, although the researchers worked as a team.

Apart from the features previously discussed, the Center for Universal Design (1997) presents seven principles of universal design that can be applied when designing learning materials. Those principles were adapted to instruction to make the students learning more effective in terms of access, pace of learning and knowledge acquisition. Besides, those principles, presented below, can be applied to learning environments, learning instruments and learning materials.

***Principle One.*** Equitable use and accessibility.

The design is accessible for everyone, the learning environment is safe and easy for students to access. Palmer (2003) affirms that instructors who work with online courses or websites must provide online resources that are accessible for all students according to their needs.

***Principle Two.*** Flexibility in use.

- The design provides opportunities for students to solve an activity by taking into account pace, learning styles and preferences of the learners.
- There are different options to use the materials and interact with the information.

***Principle Three.*** Straightforward and consistent.

- The design has to be easy to understand and provide enough feedback to improve the language and the skills that have to be performed.
- The instrument avoids confusion, complexity or distractions.

***Principle Four.*** Perceptible and explicit information.

- The design communicates all the information necessary to do the task in an appealing way.
- The instrument is easy to read and provides clear information avoiding barriers to understanding.

***Principle Five.*** Tolerance for error.

- The design warns of possible errors.
- The design must present a learning environment that fosters risk-taking and learning from mistakes.

***Principle Six.*** Low physical effort or requirements.

- The design eliminates irrelevant efforts to complete a course or the activities.

- The design minimizes the steps to look for information or to complete the tasks.
- Materials access should be easy for learners.

***Principle seven.*** Size and space for approach and use.

Both virtual and physical spaces must be available and learning supportive.

Although, the principles provided by the Centre of Universal Design (1997) guided the creation of the learning material proposed for this project, the characteristics presented by Gustafson and Branch (2002) were taken as the basis for this study's instructional design that followed their ADDIE model.

At this point, the main concepts underlying this research project have been discussed from the perspective of different authors. In the next chapter, the research design characteristics for this project are presented.

### Chapter Three: Research Design

In this chapter, the researchers inform about the design of the research project: nature of the study, research type, context, participants, ethical considerations, instruments, and procedures.

The summary of the research framework is presented in Table 1:

Table 1.  
*Summary of the Research Framework*

<b>RESEARCH TYPE</b>	Design-Based Research
<b>CONTEXT</b>	Saludcoop Sur, a public academic school located in Bogotá, Colombia
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	34 ninth graders, ages 15 to 17 with A1 English level.
<b>DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS</b>	Pre-post test Students' journals Students' artifacts Teachers' observations Teachers and Students' self-assessment checklists
<b>RESEARCH TIMELINE</b>	In order to see the complete research timeline, see Table 2 in chapter four

#### Nature of the Study: Pilot Study

According to Polit (2001), a pilot study is a small preliminary research project that seeks to determine if the research is realistic and whether the application presents potential problems with the instruments, the data collection and analysis. In other words, a pilot study aims at observing the possible unnoticed problems a research could present that could make it

unfeasible. A pilot study refers to two different options of researching. The first one is the “small scale version, or trial run, done in preparation for the major study” (Polit, et. al., 2001, p. 467), and the second one may be a pre-testing of a research instrument which might include interview schedules or questionnaires (Baker, 1994). For the purpose of this research project, the pilot study can be stated as a pre-testing regarding the platform design, lesson and activities, including the collaborative techniques (forums, tests and journals).

Thus, it is expected that from the results the data gathered and analyzed in this research project, the researchers can conclude if there are any possible improvements in:

- The instructional design process, focusing on students’ understanding of the instructions.
- The online collaborative learning dynamics.

It is also expected that this pilot study will present relevant information about the level of comfort experienced by the students when they participate in forums, difficulties in carrying out the activities or the complexity of the instruments.

### **Research Type: Design-Based Research**

Design Based Research (DBR hereafter) is defined as a flexible methodology intended to “improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings” (Wang & Hannafin, 2005, p. 6). This means that DBR is proposed for educational purposes to develop designs that can be tested to improve the teachers’ practice, including the learners in real-like learning settings, being this the purpose of the present DBR.



This pilot study followed the DBR as a research model. DBR (Herrington, 2007) is applied in research practices to give solution to some problems in learning environments where other types of research are not as effective as DBR. McKinney and Reeves (2014) propose the multi-phase model (See Figure 2) that is based on design principles and organized in three phases by:

1. Analysis and exploration of the problem
2. Design and construction
3. Evaluation and reflection

The first phase defines the analysis and exploration of the problem taking into account population, criteria and goals for the design solution. For this research project, the researchers started by observing their educational contexts and after identifying the large size class issue, they applied a needs analysis to some ninth grade students at Saludcoop Sur school. As a result, they started shaping the idea of using an online pedagogical tool for solving the identified issue.

The second phase is the proposal of the DBR and the construction stage. During this phase, the researchers concentrated on the possible solutions to the problem, and defined the setting to implement the proposal, in the case of this intervention, the online learning environment. Hence, the researchers read relevant theory about large size classes and they came up with the idea of including collaborative learning as part of the online pedagogical tool in order to provide possible answers to the problem and to guide the draft of an instructional design following the universal principles mentioned in the previous chapter, proposed by Center for Universal Design (1997).

The third phase is the evaluation and reflection of the design stage. The purpose of this phase is to conclude how the outcome of the investigation meets the predetermined specifications to solve the problem (Plomp, 2007). During this phase, the researchers of this study collected data to determine the impact of the proposal by means of the data analysis and evaluation of the implementation. The results provided by the data analysis allowed the researchers to refine the pedagogical proposal. In fact, the design improves in practice, reaching an iterative cycle with the “continuous cycles of design, enactment, analysis, and redesign” (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003, p. 5). Particularly, one iterative cycle in this study was evident after the researchers started implementing the pedagogical proposal and noticed they needed to adjust the lessons and instructional design. Also, having in mind that it is a pilot study, at the moment of carrying out the major research, changes will be made based on the current teacher-researchers conclusions drawn from the data collected. The cycle previously described is presented in figure 2.

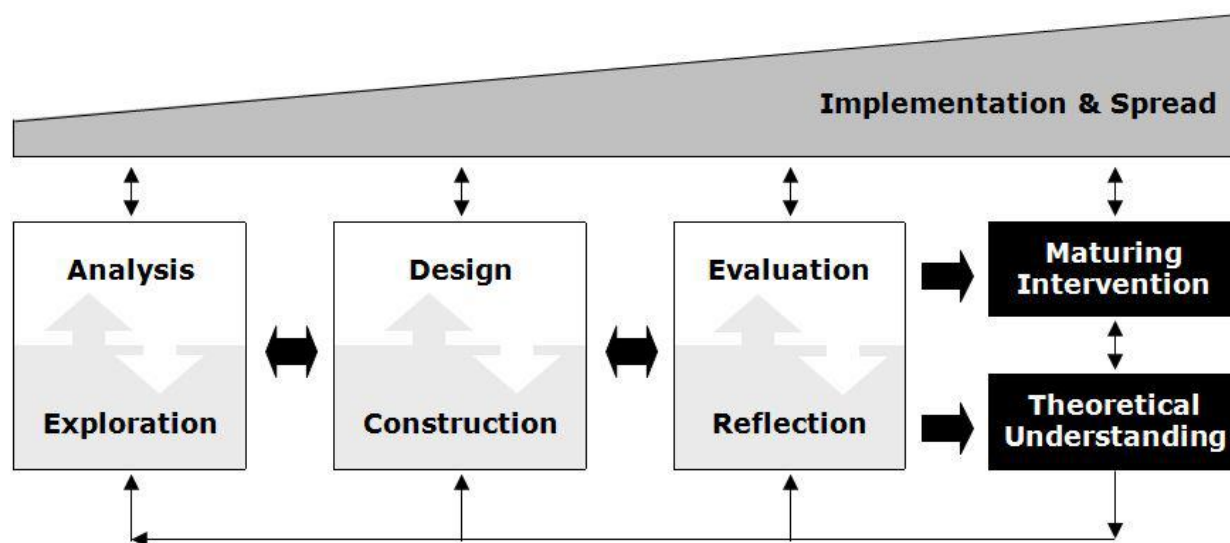


Figure 2. The multi-phase model for educational design research. Taken from McKenney and Reeves (2012, p. 537).

### **Context and Participants**

The study was carried out with thirty-four children in an English class from Colegio Saludcoop Sur Bogotá. This is a public academic school with students from pre-school to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Learners who participated in this study are in ninth grade and they are between 15 and 17 years old. They have A1 level of English proficiency according to the CEFR. English classes for ninth grade are held for 110 minutes once a week. This study was implemented for eight weeks with four online collaborative work lessons.

The criteria used to select the members of the study was the following:

- Students from ninth grade from the mentioned public school.
- Students with access to internet.
- Students that had the consent from parents and wanted to participate.

### **Researcher's Role**

For the purpose of this study, consistent with DBR methodology, teachers were designers and researchers. They followed the phases from the multi-phase model for educational design research (McKinney and Reeves, 2012).

During the implementation process, there were two researcher roles: participant teacher and analyzing-observing teachers. On the one hand, the participant teacher, who was the English teacher, put into practice the methodological strategy, directed the project with the students, and trained them in the use of the Moodle platform and the dynamics of collaborative work. The participant teacher was the one interacting with the students and giving them the instructions and the feedback. This teacher was a facilitator, guiding learners during the implementation. On the other hand, there were two analyzing-observing teachers who designed

the proposal, accompanied the implementation process and described the development of the lessons, students' performance in the activities and supported the participant teacher. They also described their perceptions on the implementation.

During the evaluation and reflection phase, the researchers analyzed the collected information to determine the value of the pedagogical design and to propose the needed improvements, taking into account that DBR is an iterative cycle that intends to provide improvements in each implementation cycle.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations of this study followed this process: The first one was to send a letter to the principal of the school asking for permission to carry out the study. Second, a consent letter was sent to the students' parents with the purpose of explaining the information and purpose of this project and asking permission to allow their children to participate. Third, students were represented with codes in the qualitative data analysis section and with numbers in the quantitative data analysis in order to protect student's identity.

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

In correspondence with the research type, data collection instruments were chosen taking into account the DBR method (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) which establishes that "design-based research uses mixed methods to analyze an intervention's outcomes and refine the intervention" (p.7). Hence, qualitative instruments such as students and teachers' journals and students' artifacts were used as instruments to collect this kind of data

that provide descriptions, perceptions and interactions from the context. Besides, the quantitative data were collected through a pre-test and post-test, teacher and Students' self-assessment checklists, as well as teachers' journals where the researchers registered the number of student forum participations in order to observe if those participations had an impact on their progress in language skills.

According to Chen (2006), using both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments in the mixed method seeks to obtain a fuller picture and deeper comprehension of a phenomenon. Therefore, in this pilot study qualitative and quantitative data were assessed, compared, combined and discussed to complete the triangulation process to identify whether participants progress is consistent with their performance during the online collaborative lessons.

**Instrument 1: pre-test and post-test.** The pre-test and post-test were specifically designed to measure the students reading comprehension (Mertler, 2009). In order to validate the data, the same instrument was applied at the beginning and at the end of this intervention. On the one hand, the writing section consisted of a brief description of the students' favorite place in Bogota; in it, they had to use the simple present tense, as well as adjectives and comparatives. On the other hand, the reading part consisted of 152-word text, recommended for beginners with an A1 English level to the CEFR and adapted from a website test (<http://www.esolcourses.com>). This test was adapted from this source in order to get closer to the learners' environment and to be aligned with the school curriculum demands regarding the use of such framework. (See appendix A).

**Instrument 2: students' artifacts.** The students' artifacts correspond to the students' forum logs. This tool was used for the learners to complete the activities on the platform and to

communicate with their classmates to build the final task. The purpose of the forums was to collect concrete evidence about the learners' use of the language and to collect data about the interaction among them, how they worked in groups and how they constructed knowledge together. (see appendix B)

**Instrument 3: students' journals.** According to Freeman, (1998) a journal is a regular account of personal feelings, reactions, reflections, and observations about class dynamics. Taking that into account, students' journals allowed the learners to record insights about the use of the platform, their impressions about the collaborative work and their progress in language learning. Due to the students' level of English, the journal was written in students' first language. Researchers used pre-determined questions they created for each lesson, in order to guide students on giving specific information related to what they liked and learned, and how they felt. (See appendix C)

**Instrument 4: teachers' journal.** In the same line, the teachers' journal is the instrument where the teachers wrote their observations during the development of the lessons. This instrument was used qualitatively by analyzing the teachers' comments on the students' performances and interactions. Also it was used quantitatively to determine the number and kinds of participations students made on the forums. (See appendix D)

**Instrument 5: teachers and Students' self-assessment checklist.** The Students' self-assessment checklist had self-assessment criteria where they assigned criteria assessment to the final product they delivered in each lesson. Those instruments allowed the researchers to observe the progress in language use, the collaboration among the group members, and the outcome produced by the group. (See appendix E)

After clarifying that the current project is a pilot study that uses the DBR cycle as its research methodology, the following chapter describes the characteristics of the pedagogical implementation.

### **Chapter Four: Pedagogical Intervention**

This chapter describes the instructional design and methodology underlying the pedagogical implementation applied with ninth graders from Saludcoop Sur school in order to find out what the implementation of collaborative work online strategy in a large size English class informs about writing and reading progress and the students' perceptions about the online collaborative instructional design proposed for the English class.

#### **Instructional Design**

In order to organize how the implementation and the research process was going to happen, the researchers organized a research timeline divided into three moments: analysis and exploration, design and construction, evaluation and reflection. During this first stage researchers planned the intervention, made a diagnosis via a need analysis and tested the students' use of language (reading and writing pre-test). The second stage was the design and construction that started with the design and creation of the lesson based on the collaborative learning online and the ADDIE model. In addition, during this stage, the implementation was carried out through the Moodle platform while the data was collected. The implementation finished with the end of the school's term and the beginning of the Holy Week recess. Then, the final stage of the process concluded with the evaluation and reflection stage. For this purpose, the post-test was applied to learners in order to finish with the language skills assessment. At the same time, the researchers started the classification and analysis of the data to write the report, as it is observed in table 2.



Table 2.  
*Research timeline*

Stages	Date	Objectives	Instrument
Analysis	Sep. 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2015	To get permission from the school's principal and parents to do the project	Letters of consent
	Sep. 21 <sup>st</sup>	To test the needs analysis survey	Need Analysis
	Jan. 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2016	To assess the reading and writing skills of learners	Pre-test
Design and construction	Sep. 21 <sup>st</sup> /15 to Jan. 20 <sup>th</sup> /16	To design four lesson plans in Moodle	Design
	Oct.27 <sup>th</sup> /15 to Feb. 6 <sup>th</sup> /16	To instruct students about collaborative work and use of platform in Moodle.	Teachers' journal
	Feb. 15 <sup>th</sup>	Lesson 1 To encourage students, learn about places to write simple sentences using adjectives through collaborative work online	Students' artifacts Students' self-assessment checklist Teacher's checklist Students' journal Teachers' journals
	Feb. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Lesson 2 To involve students to learn about touristic places in Colombia and use comparatives through collaborative work online	
	Mar. 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Lesson 3 To involve students to learn about carnivals and celebrations in Colombia and use superlatives through collaborative work online	
	Mar. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Lesson 4 To allow students to practice about adjectives, comparatives and superlatives forms for writing a letter that describes Colombia through collaborative work online.	
Evaluation and reflection	Mar. 19 <sup>th</sup>	To assess the reading and writing skills of learners as a result of the course experience	Post-test
	Mar. 20 <sup>th</sup>	To consolidate forums in the forums chart from lesson 1 to lesson 4	Matrix & Students' artifacts
	Mar. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	To consolidate journals of students from lesson 1 to lesson 4 in observation chart	Matrix & Students' Journals

	Mar. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	To Consolidate data from checklist	Checklist results & statistics
	Mar. 25 <sup>th</sup>	To consolidate data of post-test	Post-test results statistics
	May. 25 <sup>th</sup>	To know the final progress in participants' reading comprehension and writing skills to analyze data and present results.	

### Intervention

Since this project had to be part of the school's academic schedule, the timeline researchers proposed for the implementation was adjusted to happen during the first term of the school's calendar (January to March, 2016). There were eight weeks in which the students were developing the activities for the Moodle platform belonging to Universidad de La Sabana. During those weeks, four lessons were uploaded to the platform and taught by the researchers. Before students got in contact with the online strategy, students received training on what collaborative learning online meant and how they could achieve on working using that strategy. Also, they had a training with their teacher on the use of the platform and some ICT tools such as Google drive.

From that point, the implementation of the lessons started to happen, lasting two weeks each one of them approximately. At the beginning, lesson one had a closer and rigorous support from the teacher, since it was the first time students faced an online strategy as the one proposed in this study. During the rest of the lessons, the students were more independent from the teacher and the latter's role was focused on monitoring, fostering participation, and giving feedback to students.

With respect to the way in which the pedagogical implementation was constructed by the researchers, there were some aspects they took into account to design the proposal. In order to start constructing the lesson plans for the intervention, the first thing researchers had in mind was the phases the ADDIE model proposed: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. As a result, the format in which the lessons were presented include each one of those phases (see Appendix F). Also, the researchers responded to one of the model's characteristics that stated the need to offer real-world performance types of activities to students. Likewise, they revised the curricular dispositions the school had regarding the English subject in order to determine the topics, language focus, and the class objectives students had to achieve during that term. As a result, the students needed to be able to understand information about personal issues in order to connect it with their context; the general topic chosen for the lessons was customs and celebration; and the present simple and adjectives as the linguistic focus. Furthermore, the fact that the researchers evidenced during the needs analysis phase of the study that students experienced some issues when reading and writing in the foreign language, was another criterion they took into account for constructing their lessons.

As previously stated, the lesson plan format used the ADDIE model phases. First, in the analysis phase the audience, the class objective, and the resources were written. Second, in the design phase, taking into account the analysis phase information, the lesson's content was designed and presented in terms of time, resources and activities. Third, the development stage described the activities in detail since this phase implied creating the needed teaching resources, then uploading the planned activities into the Moodle platform, and making any needed adjustments taking into account the activities appearance and

transitions among them. Fourth, the implementation stage gave account of students' development of the activities, guided by the teachers' support and feedback. Fifth, the evaluation phase presented the assessment instruments the researchers decided to use, in this particular case, journals (See appendix C) and checklists. The use of those instruments allowed students to evaluate the design, the collaborative work dynamics, as well as their perceptions on the progress of the language.

Apart from the previous information, as part of the lesson planning process, the researchers took into consideration the features and development of collaborative learning online. Hence, online lessons gave the students the structure to work collaboratively by starting with individual and simple activities and guide learners to form groups and develop complex tasks together (See appendix G). To collect the information for completing the tasks, students shared their activities, their knowledge and opinions through the forums or chats. All those steps were repeated throughout each lesson.

The lessons started by presenting activities focused on students' learning and participation, not on the teachers' instructions (learner centered). As part of the evaluation phase, at the end of each lesson, students filled a self-assessment and wrote a personal journal. The personal journal answers could be written in students' first language, in order to facilitate the free expression and the extensive answers. Similarly, the teacher also evaluated the students' performance through another checklist (criteria about specific knowledge, collaborative learning skills and use of the platform (Moodle). Also it is important to highlight that due to the students' proficiency level, just for the first lesson, the researchers decided to write the instructions using the mother tongue and the target language at the same time.

Regarding language teaching and learning directions, the activities had some features. During the initial part of the lesson, most of the activities intended to activate previous knowledge about the topic through open questions and appealing types of activities such as interactive puzzles. Following the lesson structure, teachers proposed some activities that guided students through the task's development. Here, learners had to search and inquire on different web resources that allowed them to complete the activities previously mentioned. After those activities were done, students found one in which they were told about the task they needed to carry out, and guided to organize groups to develop the task collaboratively. Having made their teams, the final part of the class included activities organized in the following steps: first, students had to share information and resources with their classmates about the topic of the task; second, students had to discuss about the ideas they collected, agree or disagree with others through forums (participation and interaction); and third, students posted their final group task.

Now that the characteristics of the pedagogical intervention were explained, the following chapter presents the findings the researchers discovered after analyzing the data collected after the implementation.

### Chapter Five: Data Analysis

This chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation of the findings resulting from this pilot study which intends to answer what the implementation of a collaborative work online strategy in a large size English class inform about students' progress in writing and reading, as well as, students' perceptions on the Online Collaborative Instructional Design proposed for the English class. Having in mind the previous information, the following chart presents an overview of the instruments and the procedures taken for the analysis.

Table 3.

*Overview of the Instruments and Procedures Taken for the Analysis*

Instruments	Nature of data	Data analysis method
Teachers & Students' self-assessment checklists	Quantitative	Grounded theory
Teachers' journals	Qualitative /quantitative	Grounded theory Descriptive statistics
Pre-test/post-test	Quantitative	Descriptive statistics
Students' artifacts (forums)	Qualitative	Grounded theory
Students' journals	Qualitative	Grounded theory

#### Data Management Procedures

For the procedures of qualitative interpretation some principles from the grounded theory were applied. According to Willig (2013)

Grounded theory involves the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from data [...] Grounded theory as method provides us with guidelines on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories and how to establish

relationships between them. Grounded theory as theory is the end-product of this process; it provides us with an explanatory framework with which to understand the phenomenon under investigation. (p. 70)

Grounded theory analysis carries out three steps: the first is to identify, find, and name conceptual categories in the data (open coding). The second one is to find relationships among those categories (axial coding). Finally, the third one is to conceptualize and choose the category to be the main ones (selective coding) (Punch, 2013).

Based on the above, during the open coding, the researchers read the collected data. Thus, after reading, coloring coding was applied to distinguish the preliminary patterns. Then, in the Axial coding, the researchers identified relationships among the open codes and classified them into nine subcategories. Finally, in Selective coding, the researchers selected central aspects from the data as the core categories with the purpose of explaining the phenomena which had been observed during this pilot study (Punch et. al., 2013). (See table 4)

Table 4.

*Categories, subcategories and patterns found after the analysis*

Categories	Subcategories	Patterns
Language and knowledge	New knowledge acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New knowledge.</li> </ul>
	Vocabulary and writing mechanics improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vocabulary improvement.</li> <li>● Improvement in writing mechanics.</li> </ul>
	Students' reflections on language learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Language interest.</li> </ul>
Students' experiences with the design	Design impact on students' motivation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Design impact on students' motivation.</li> <li>● Accessibility.</li> </ul>
	Students' perceptions of the online design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students' perception on the online design.</li> </ul>
	Effectiveness of the design on learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of the instructional design.</li> </ul>

Collaborative work online features	Responsibility, commitment and time management in collaborative work online. Students' perceptions in collaborative work online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time management.</li> <li>• Distribution of responsibilities.</li> </ul>
	Students' interactions in collaborative work online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students disagreement on collaborative work</li> <li>• Students agreement on collaborative work</li> <li>• Students' perceptions of the online design</li> <li>• Instead of interaction there was exchange of information</li> </ul>

---

On the other hand, the quantitative interpretations were the result of the descriptive statistics method that describes the basic features of the data with summary charts and tables. Hence, the quantitative analysis took into account the comparison between the Pre-test and Post-test, a description of results from the students and Teachers' checklists, and tally of students' participation during lessons from the Teachers' journals. The researchers described the numerical results, analyzed them and draw conclusions over those findings (Rugg, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

The progress students had on reading and writing was enhanced by the online tool, mostly in writing. Regarding the students' perceptions on the Online Collaborative Instructional Design, the researchers found that the design was mainly accepted by students. Additionally, the steps to achieve the final tasks, definitely allowed students to complete those tasks effectively. In relation to the collaborative learning online, students interacted, but this interaction was limited to the exchange of information, which allowed the tasks delivery, but not the collective construction of knowledge that collaborative learning requires.

In order to exemplify and support the previous findings, some excerpts from the data were selected for each category.



**Category 1. Language and knowledge.** This category informed about the reading and writing progress of students during and after the implementation. Students' insights in their journals and artifacts allowed researchers to identify that most of them considered they had learned new vocabulary related to adjectives and were able to write short sentences more accurately. Learners also recognized they knew information about some important cultural features about Colombia regarding touristic places, celebrations, and festivals.

Language and knowledge category emerged from three subcategories, as the following figure illustrates:

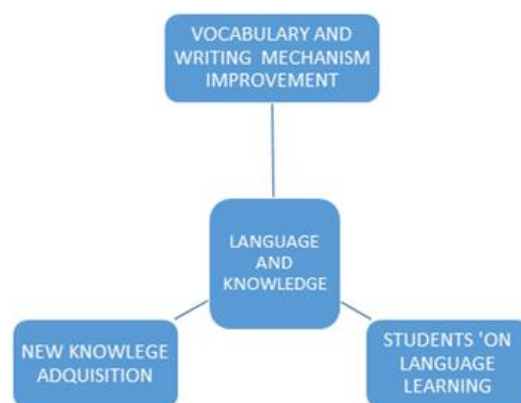


Figure 3. First category. This figure illustrates the three subcategories that built the language and knowledge category.

***New knowledge acquisition.*** This subcategory informed that students learned new information about Colombian touristic places, celebrations and festivals. An example of the above statement was expressed by a student in a journal of lesson 2. The student said he had learned vocabulary related to places and new facts about Colombia, although, he expressed difficulties in understanding the task:

“Fue buena, aunque no entendiera como realizar el scrapbook, conocí mas lugares de Colombia... Aprendí algo más en esta unidad así como un poco más de vocabulario” (S25J0303)<sup>3</sup>

In the same way, a teacher confirmed in the Teacher's journal in lesson 2, that students had connected knowledge and language during the implementation of the proposal with this note:

“some students show interest in the lessons, not only because it is an innovative learning tool, but also they have learned new places and vocabulary related to Colombia”. (TYML20309)

The previous information is an evidence of how the collaborative work online tool allowed students not only to activate their linguistic competence, but also to explore and learn about cultural elements from their own country.

***Vocabulary and writing mechanics improvement.*** This subcategory is related to the writing process in which the students worked on building vocabulary in order to transfer their knowledge to written language and to know how mechanics function in a text.

Students demonstrated that they used the vocabulary included in the lessons; they were also able to write sentences in simple present to make descriptions using connectors. An example appeared in one of the lesson 3 forums, where students had to describe and suggest two touristic places in Colombia:

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<sup>3</sup> Students' comments are transcribed without correction or modification.

“I recommended the Pueblito Paisa in Medellin because is very beautiful, interesting, and big. b. I suggest to visit the Coffee Park in Armenia, because is big, funny, awesome and agreeable “(S1L3F1)

The words ‘beautiful’, ‘interesting’, and ‘awesome’ were included in the content of lesson 3, which were also used by the student in the previous written artifact.

Another example presented how some students could produce a better complete idea following the sample in the instructions from each task. A student, in the lesson 1 poster where they needed to describe a place in Bogota, wrote:

“The restaurant Crepes & Waffles, this restaurant is located in CC Plaza Imperial, CC Hayuelos, CC Gran Estacion, and others. In this place we can eat very good food and ice cream, we think that this restaurant it’s a quiet place, but is crowded. In this place we can find different variety of food. We recommended this restaurant because it’s a nice place, with good food and attention”. (S1F10223).

The above sample also evidenced writing that the student constructed following the model provided and suggested by the teacher as a result of the learning experience this student had by going through the content of the lesson. Thus, the learner wrote short complete sentences with subject and predicate, (e.g. “This place we can eat very good food and ice cream”), he used adjectives to describe and contrast the positive and negative aspect of a place by using the preposition “but”. (e.g. “This restaurant it’s a quiet place, but is crowded”) and he used “can” properly to describe the place (e.g. “In this place we can find different variety of food”). Therefore, the learner achieved the goal of the lesson that allowed him to be able to describe places of Bogotá.

***Students' reflections on language learning.*** This subcategory presented the students' insights about the language learning process during the implementation of the proposal of this research project. In general terms, students' perceptions about the language learning process through the collaborative learning online tool was positive and satisfactory.

An example of the previous statement can be observed at the end of lessons 2 and 3 in Students' journals:

“Esta experiencia ha sido de gran ayuda para aprender nuevas palabras, nuevos terminos en ingles” (S29J0224)

“Mi experiencia fue buena. Cada paso tenia algo que me enseñó de los lugares turisticos, y mucho abjetivos también aprendí” (S18J0304)

The previous comments agreed on the learning of new vocabulary in their acquisition process. Also, in the second comment, the student validated the characteristics of the design as part of reaching the learning goals by mentioning the steps provided in the lesson.

In general terms, the qualitative data showed that students had a positive perception regarding their language learning process through the collaborative online tool, recognizing they improved some of their linguistic competence and cultural knowledge during the implementation. This information can be also supported by quantitative data provided by the Pre-test, Post-test, and Teachers and Students' self-assessment checklists.

After analyzing the Pre-test and Post-test results, they informed that 23 out of 34 nine graders demonstrated progress in reading comprehension and writing production after presenting those tests. Researchers took into account only 23 students due to the fact that only

those learners took both Pre-test and Post-test. As it can be seen in Figure 4, the 23 students are represented by the 68%.

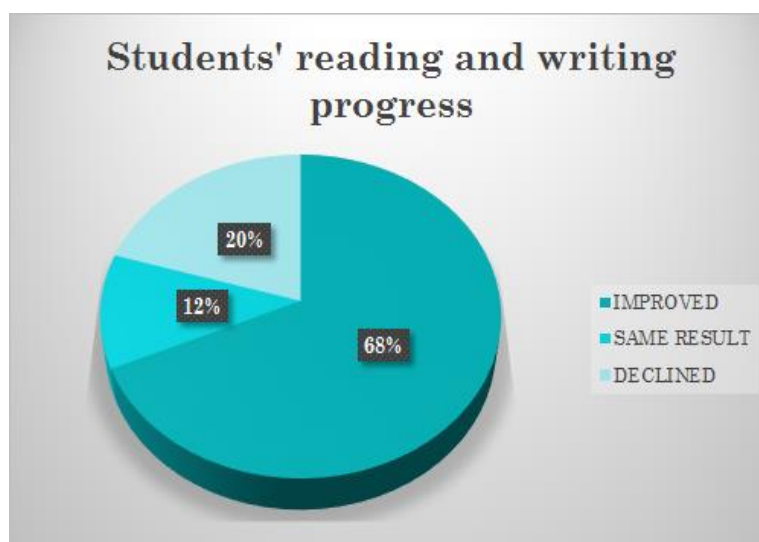


Figure 4. Pre-test and Post-test student's progress.

It is important to clarify that students showed a higher progress in writing production than in reading comprehension after the Post-test. Comparing the two tests, as it is shown in figure 5, 77% of students improved in the writing section, while just 34% of them showed progress in the reading section.

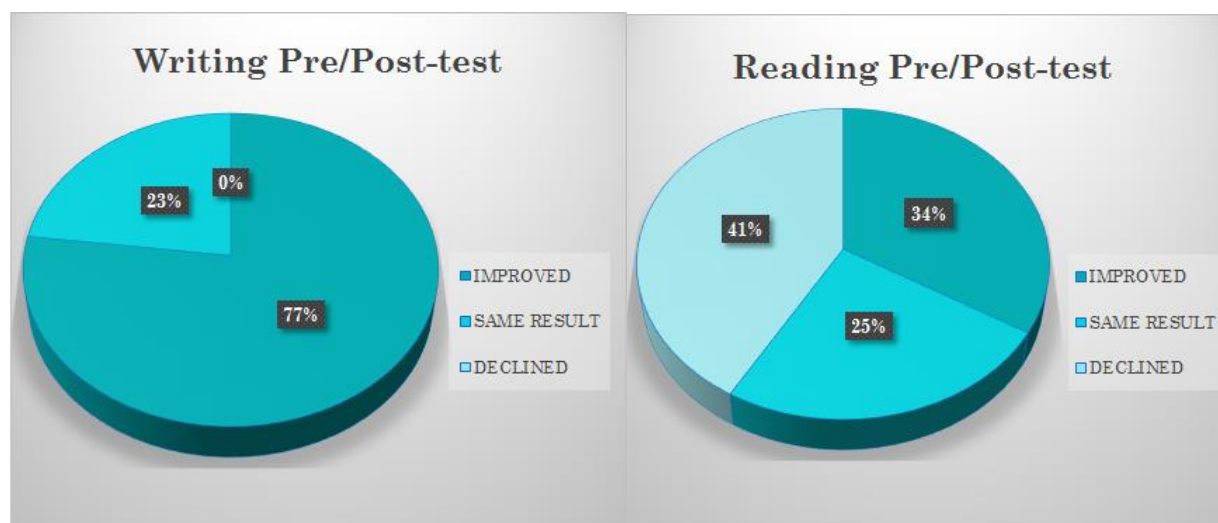


Figure 5. Reading and writing Pre/post-test.

Similarly, some data provided by the Teachers' checklists supported the fact that students improved in writing. Figure 6 represents how teacher evaluated whether or not students could use and recognize vocabulary needed for the writing tasks by using the criteria of Very good, O.K., and Needs for improvement. Thus, during lesson 1, the teacher considered that 3,23% of students could recognize words related to the topic addressed by that unit. This percentage increased during lessons 2 (16,13%) and 3 (19,35%), corroborating that progressively students improved their linguistic knowledge, and therefore, their writing production.

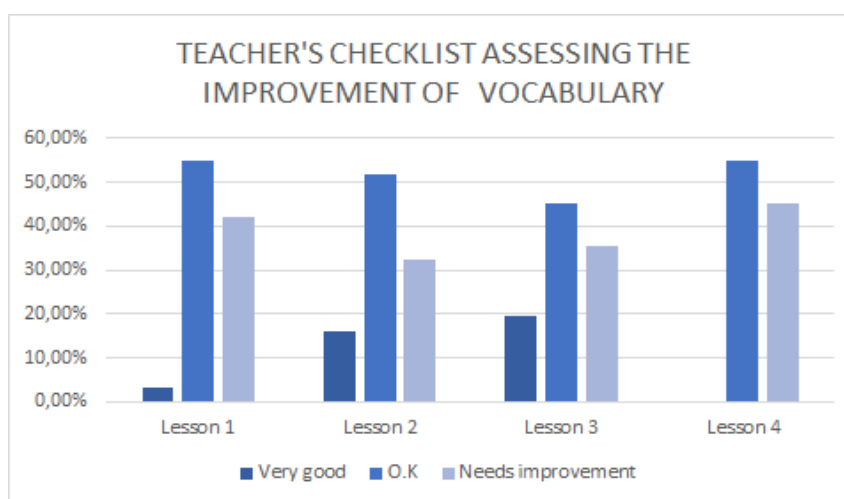


Figure 6. Vocabulary improvement.

**Category 2. Students' experiences with the design.** This category provided information about the students' perceptions regarding the design proposal, their experiences with the use of the Moodle platform, their ICT skills, likes and dislikes regarding the activities and, in general their insights about the characteristics of the design proposal.

This category emerged from three subcategories, as illustrated in figure 7:

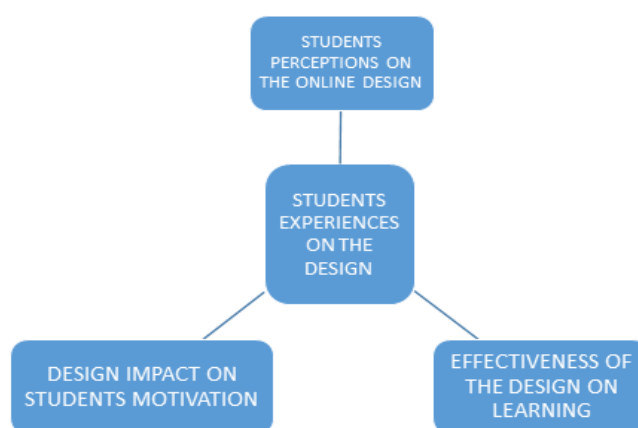


Figure 7. Second category.

***Design impact on students' motivation.*** This subcategory presented the impact that the design had on the learners in terms of motivation, attraction, and how the design helped them to feel involved in the activities and to feel comfortable with the development of the lessons.

Students used similar adjectives to evaluate the design: good tool, easy and enjoyable, good experience, I felt better, among others, which implies that they refer to the experience in a positive way. On the contrary, negative perceptions are few and driven by the lack of commitment to do the activities from other classmates more than from the design itself.

From the students' journal in lesson 3, the following excerpt presented a student's perception on how appealing the proposal was to him:

“...en esta leccion me senti mejor haciendo el trabajo y es bueno que los pongan tambien de una manera divertida aveces no todo escribir. no me gustaba para nada el ingles pero haora lo estoy manejando un poquito más” (S5J0303)

The description above demonstrated how students felt involved with the activities and described the experience as positive using adjectives such as ‘fun’ and ‘entertaining’. The students' perceptions of how easy and enjoyable the activity was, makes motivation and engagement visible. This helped students to finish the activity and maybe felt proud of it. The students' comments in their Journals demonstrated a general sense of comfort with the design, they enjoyed working on it which made them feel it was effective for learning.

However, a few negative perceptions on the design appeared during the implementation process. The following excerpt was taken from a Student's Journal during lesson 2:

“...pues en el transcurso de las actividades me he dado cuenta que ya no le ven interes al asunto por mi parte esto ya me produce es aburrimiento ya que nadie se pone serio con las actividades...” (S9JO2003)

This perception demonstrated that the student's feeling of boredom with the activities was caused by the lack of commitment of his/her group's members. Maybe, this learner was referring to collaborative activities not to the design itself. It implies that the way in which interactions are carried out during collaborative activities might have an effect on students' perceptions about the design.

Likewise, the teacher observed in one of her journals that students' motivation could have also been affected due to their lack of familiarity with the Moodle platform. The fact that



students did not have enough experience with online environments could have influenced their attitude and perception towards the design and their role as language learners. The following excerpt was taken from a teacher's journal during lesson 1:

"I observed them interested on the platform however they do not understand a lot of instructions because is the first time they see a platform with those characteristics."  
(TYML10215)

*Students' perceptions of the online design.* This subcategory presented what students thought about the design in general: instructions and activity development during the implementation.

Most of the students found that the design was innovative for learning and helped them learning the language. Two students, during lesson 2, commented that they saw the design proposal as adequate and as a good experience. Also, one of them affirmed that the activities were easy to carry out.

"Me parecio muy adecuado pienso que es una manera muy facil de aprender ingles, las actividades muy faciles de desarrollar" (S19J0224)

"It WAS A VERY GOOD EXPERIENCE AND learned many things about it"  
(S18J0222)

The teachers' observations confirmed the understanding of the activities, steps and tasks, and the successful completion of the activities from the majority of the students:

"Most of the Students understood how the platform works and how to communicate with their partners, they could follow the steps and complete the tasks successfully. The forums were used as chat rooms were the groups worked together...." (TDBL1)

As was mentioned in chapter four, the first lesson had instructions in Spanish and English in order to get students acquainted with the design. This strategy allowed students to have a better learning process in the language, which resulted in a positive perception about the design. This situation was evidenced in one of the student's journals after lesson 2:

“ademas de que estaba traducido al español estaba muy bien explicada, pues mediante la lección pude aprender mas sobre los lugares de Bogotá y también pude agrandar mi vocabulario.” (S4J0224)

However, there were some negative perceptions about the design, particularly in some activities or steps that were difficult to develop due to the lack of access to some tools that could have helped students construct the outcome for the task. For example, in lesson 2, students had difficulties working on the scrapbook, where they had to find and paste a lot of pictures in order to compare two touristic places of Colombia. As a consequence, most of students said that activities were easy but for the final task, they had difficulties when understanding the instructions and doing the required activities.

“neeee me parecio facil asta q llego el crachbook o algo asi por que todo se volvio complicado ademas fue un cuento hacerlo con mis compañeros...” (S140307)

The teacher reaffirmed the difficulty students had during lesson 2 in one of her observations from the same lesson:

“Students could not use the tool suggested for doing the scrapbook. It makes the process stopped till the teacher suggested other tools for completing the task. A lot of students did not finish this lesson” (TYML2)

***Effectiveness of the online design.*** This subcategory considered students' insights and experiences to know if they perceived the design useful for a language learning progress.

To begin with, working on activities where students could communicate with others and develop tasks in a platform caught the attention of learners. The fact of finding something interesting and unusual activated students' performance in the proposed tasks, which could promote learning or language improvement. An example of this statement can be seen in the comments by two students in their journals of lesson 2 and 3:

“Me Parece Que Hay Actividades Que Nos Ayuda A Mejorar En Lo Que No Sabemos Me Divierto Mucho Haciendo estas Actividades” (S12J0304)

“me e sentido muy bien y pues no es que haya aprendido un monton pero ciertas cosas se me quedaron en la cabeza. ..fue interesante utilizar una plataforma para hacer tareas y comunicarnos.” (S20J0219)

Students also confirmed they improved their knowledge through the design, despite the fact that they felt disappointed with their English learning process. For example, a description of a learner's' experience with the proposal in the Moodle platform was mentioned by a student in his journal of lesson 3:

“Aunque esta materia no me guste mucho & se me dificulte mucho con esta plataforma eh logrado aprender algo mas & asi poder aumentar mis conocimientos aunque el año pasado con la profesora que estaba nos enseñó mucho este año he podido aprender nuevos términos & palabras de ingles de las cuales no sabia nada”. (S20J0304)

The above insights demonstrated the efficacy that the design offered as a new strategy to learn and practice. Through the previous excerpt, it was evident that students were able to understand the activities as such, due to their simplicity. There, the learner affirmed that the learning experience through the online design allowed him to learn more things.

Similarly, students' experiences on the design category is also supported by quantitative data. With this in mind, data obtained from the Teachers' Journals presented the amount of times that learners posted their individual assignments and discussed with their classmates on the online collaborative tasks, as seen in figure 8, the total participations of students in each lesson are displayed. These data demonstrated that learners had 183 interventions during lesson 2 and 181 interventions during lesson 3. It is important to clarify that during lesson 4, results were low because it happened before Holy week, and students were focused on other tasks for the school. Those results provided evidence of the increased interest and engagement that students showed when working on the tasks and using the online tool.

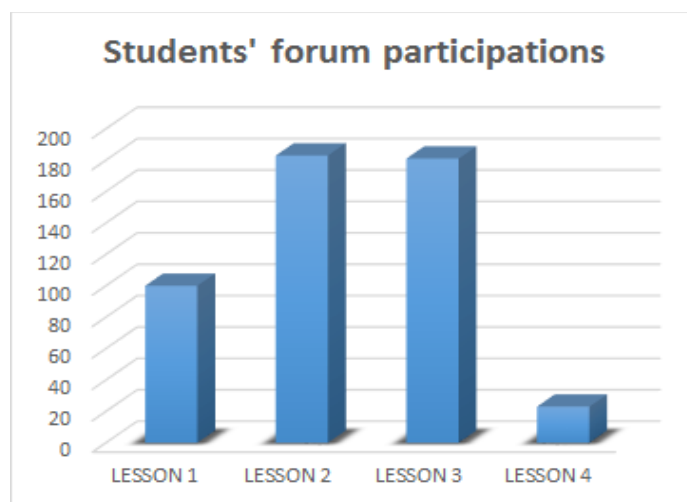


Figure 8. Students' forum participations.

**Category 3. Collaborative learning online features.** This category informed about particular aspects that students expressed after working in a collaborative learning online strategy proposed through an instructional design.

Based on some comments provided by the Students' Journals and artifacts, some students found it interesting to work collaboratively online because it facilitated the

development of tasks and increased language learning; whereas, for others collaborative work online was difficult to achieve due to lack of social skills, commitment and responsibility.

Furthermore, the interaction, which is an important aspect of collaborative learning online, was observed as a simple information exchange due to some difficulties that students had with the time management and negotiation, elements that are required in order to achieve a successful interaction process.

This category came out from three subcategories, as illustrated in figure 9:

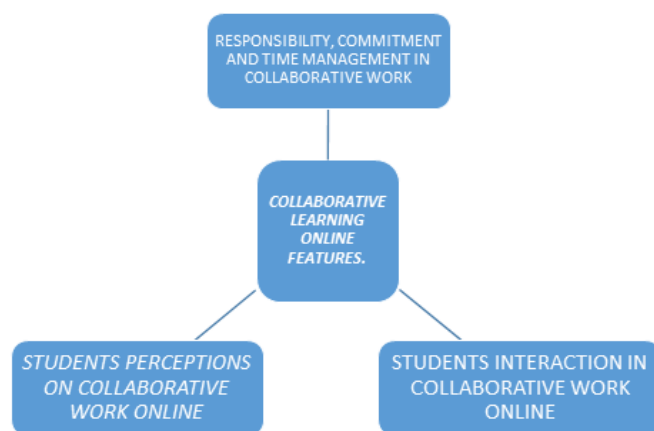


Figure 9. Third category.

***Responsibility, commitment and time management in collaborative work online.*** This subcategory described how students supported individual contributions, organized and planned specific activities through collaborative learning online.

The Students' Artifacts (forums) allowed researchers to observe how most of the students came to collaborative tasks by distributing responsibilities and assigning specific tasks among the group members. For example, a student, who was working on lesson 1, helped his group to get organized by dividing duties:

“...Hello I'll take care of the investigation [...] now you are looking for images for buck to do the design [...] are already images and research each park and can make the poster

and upload it on the fourth activity...” (S6FOL1)

In the previous excerpt the student was distributing responsibilities among group members in order to complete the task, whose objective was to present a poster describing a place they chose. With the expression “Hello I'll take care of the investigation” the student was taking part as a group member who seeks for writing information about the place they were going to work at. With the expression “now you are looking for images for buck to do the design,” the student wanted another student to look for images to paste on the poster. Then this student explained to the group that the images and the “research” were done, and thus, the other group members could complete the design of the poster in order to upload it, maybe suggesting that another member could do this part of the work.

In the same way, a student in lesson 3, where learners had to design a cartoon and write a conversation between two characters talking about the best carnivals and celebrations in Colombia, commented the following:

“No, I make the dialogue, you make the cartoon. okay?” (S1FOL3)

Collaborative work requires more than assigning duties; it implies that students interact not only for sharing their ideas with the group, but for the common construction and transformation of ideas into new knowledge (Dillenbourg 1999). The previous excerpt reflected commitment from students in order to present the tasks and an effort to work in group; however, it was evident that each student was involved in just accomplishing a certain task to ensure getting things done, without going through any type of negotiation, discussion or reflection.

In fact, given the situation of lack of effective interaction among students in the platform, learners did not discuss the establishment of clear goals with specific planned steps

in order to fulfill the expected task. As a result, students faced obstacles for arranging suitable times and meeting with others online. Some samples of those difficulties were expressed by students in their journals.

In lesson 1 and 3, two different students expressed difficulties for meeting with others online, and uploading the activities on time. However, they accomplished their final task:

“hola esta lesion fue un poco complicaba por que unos compañeros no podian conectarsen a la hora de los demas y llegaron haber dificultades, pero hay llegamos a terminar nuestro trabajo” (S25JO1403)

“El problema es el tiempo pero al final logramos hacerlo, aportamos y aprendimos en esta lección.” (S29J0304)

The insights presented above, reflected how some students attempted to work collaboratively with effort. Nevertheless, there were aspects like time management and interaction, which were not accurately developed by learners, producing interference on the collaboration processes communication. That issue was observed and reflected by the teacher in the journal of lesson 3 :

“Some students have recognized that they do not like to work in group because some students do not set up a meeting. They do not deal or they are not responsible.” (TYML3)

Supporting the previous findings, some quantitative data were found in the Students’

In figure 10, the criteria related to time management during collaborative work presented a 54,08% of learners who demonstrated a need for improving in their posting on time in the forums and journals. It means that although students thought time was not well managed by most of them, they perceived it improved as the lessons advanced. This finding evidently supports the fact that collaborative learning online needs to be trained and takes time



while learners get used to the tool and what collaboration implies

Figure 10. Managing Time is the item that assesses posts of students on time.

***Students' perceptions on collaborative work online.*** This subcategory informed about the students' perceptions on the collaborative online strategy proposed for the English class.

Here, some students commented positively about the collaborative work online. For example, a student in his journal of lesson 3 used the adjective 'excellent' to describe his experience working in a group:

“Mi experiencia en este modulo mejore bastante con las actividades y aprendi mas cosas me senti exelente trabajando en grupo con mis compañeros” (S19J0304)

This excerpt demonstrated that there were students who felt comfortable and could work in a



group. In addition, other students thought that collaborative work allowed them to learn from others. Some examples related to the above statements appeared in the Students' Journal from lesson 3:

“me gusta trabajar mucho en grupo es muy chevere podemos intercambiar ideas con las demas persona & ellas conmigo puedo preguntar si no entiendo algo ellos me explican”  
(S13JO0320)

“Me Gusta Trabajar En Grupo Pues Mis Compañeros Me Aportan Mucho & Yo A Ellos Asi No Sepa Mucho Me Gustar Mucho Trabajar Asi Pues Se Interactua Mejor & Es Mas Facil” (S12J0304)

As a consequence of the positive view students had on the Online Collaborative Learning, some of them affirmed that they trusted their team-work partners. Regarding this, at the end of lesson 3, a student said the following:

“Fue buena, aunque me gusta trabajar mas con mi grupo, no se si haya mucho problema en eso pero con ellas hago mucho mejor los trabajos y nos aportamos entre todas. bien tengo mucha confianza con mi grupo, así que no hubo ningún inconveniente!. (S1J0301)

Even though, the above comments demonstrated that students had some difficulties working in the design, they expressed they could give better solutions to the obstacles through the support and confidence the group members generated. As a result, they felt that working in group encouraged them to work better and improve their learning process.

To confirm the above, an excerpt taken from a forum in lesson 1, showed a student's comment on another group's task:

“the poster of ... is great. they mention the category of restaurants. They Use Adjectives

and Describe Three Restaurants Now I know about restaurants of Peruvian food. Congrats.” (S12FOL1)

This excerpt was relevant because those kinds of comments include the self- and peer assessment practices that collaborative learning dynamics require. The use of those types of evaluation, permit students to recognize others’ achievements, as well as receive new knowledge.

However, there were negative perceptions about the Online Collaborative Learning. The first aspect was generated by the anxiety among the group members where some of them felt workloaded. In the following example, a student, in his journal of lesson 1, said:

“solo que me incomodo demasiado que mi grupo no hiciera nada y me toco hacer completamente todo, hasta me toco ayudar a una compañera del grupo porque según ella no podía entrar a la pagina, y la verdad no me gusto eso, me parece mal echo que uno se esfuerze y los demás no” (S16JO1703)

That excerpt confirmed that students felt annoyed, uncomfortable, and even stressed, when noticing that their classmates did not show any interest or commitment when being in charge of some duties. At the end, the student complained about doing individual efforts, while the others did not care.

The second aspect was regarding to the lack of contributions, responsibilities and commitment of some students when working in group. A learner expressed his disagreement with the group members in the journal of lesson 3, informing they had neither worked, nor presented the final task.

“lo que no me gusto fue el trabajo en grupo porque ellas no aportaban un buen desempeño al hacer el trabajo si yo no las molesto para que lo hagamos ellas hubieran

dejado pasar el trabajo y no hubieran hecho nada y a mi no me gusto eso porque yo si queria hacer el trabajo” (S18J0304)

Consequently, the last excerpt confirmed that lack of participation has a negative effect on students’ willingness to reach the goals. That is due to the responsibility avoidance of some group members.

The third aspect mentioned that students demonstrated apathy for working in group. An example was given by a student in his journal of lesson 3, where he affirmed he did not like to work in group:

“nome placer trabajar en el grupo I prefiero hacerlo de forma individual a pasar menos tiempo”.(S27J0305)

Additionally, there were other excerpts which confirmed students preferred to work independently. The reasons students provided were related to: working collaboratively online was time-consuming, people got distracted with social networks and other applications during the group meetings, and there were disagreements among group members. For instance, a student in his journal of lesson 2 said:

“lo complicado fue la comunicacion entres mis compañeros ya que todos no somos iguales...aunque la verdad los trabajos en grupo por una red social no es muy buena idea ya que todos se distraen facil mente con cualquier cosa, como facebook, youtube, juegos, etc”. (S20J0219)

Other reasons some students gave to work independently were related to their consciousness on their own social or cognitive skills. For example, a student in his journal from lesson 2 commented that when working with others, he might feel confused, which made him prefer to work alone:

“hello I do not really like Working Group Much For That one confused me gusta mas individual work in virtual activities I think it's better to work alone” (S27J0219)

***Students' interaction in collaborative work online.*** Interaction is an important aspect in collaborative work online because it develops reflection and validation for producing effective learning (Buzzetto-More, 2007). However, after analyzing the data, the researchers found that interaction in this pilot study was presented as an exchange of information without having an active response of agreement or disagreement from others. An example of the last statement was presented in a forum post from lesson 2, in which students were asked to choose and compare touristic places from Colombia.

“I recommend the Castle of San Felipe located in cartagena. Well, I made the phrase One place. serious cartagena hotel is broader than that of San Andrés digamen as if that or another Castle of San Felipe is larger than the aquarium san andres” (S24FOL2.)

Here, the student participated in the forum by suggesting the Castle of San Felipe was one of the touristic places to compare. He also affirmed that his contribution would be one sentence, and he required his partner to evaluate which of the two sentences, he proposed, was the correct one. However, he did not receive any feedback from his group partners. The previous explanation shows that there was no discussion or reflection in order to give feedback or create new knowledge. On the contrary, some discussions were just posted and led by a person who planned and decided how to work. It means that the process of negotiation where students transfer and construct knowledge together was not completely performed.

Indeed, researchers found some information related to students' interactions in the learners' artifacts (forums) that enlighten the dynamic of the interaction component in these findings.

As can be seen in figure 11, the interaction among learners increased with the progress of the lessons. The interactions here belong to the moment when students were exchanging information for making decisions and assigning work as a group, in order to carry out the final task. In the first lesson, there are just five posts that reflect students' interactions. Then, in lesson 2 the number of learners' interactions increased to 52. Similarly, lesson 3 doubled the number of interactions students had in group work. This dynamic might be related to students' better confidence when using the online tools provided by the implementation, as well as their better understanding on what the collaboration implies. Lesson 4 presented low participation due to the short time students had to complete the activities because this lesson coincided with the end of the first term, in consequence students devoted their time to exams, final tasks and other mandatory activities.

After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers found that the role of the collaborative work online strategy on the reading and writing students' progress was promoting some features of the linguistic competence, such as the lexical one, as well as some cultural knowledge about their country. The result was evidenced in students showing improvement on the writing skills they had during the tests they took at the beginning and the end of the implementation. However, when looking at the relationship between the online collaborative work and the language progress, the role of the former was not stronger in the latter.

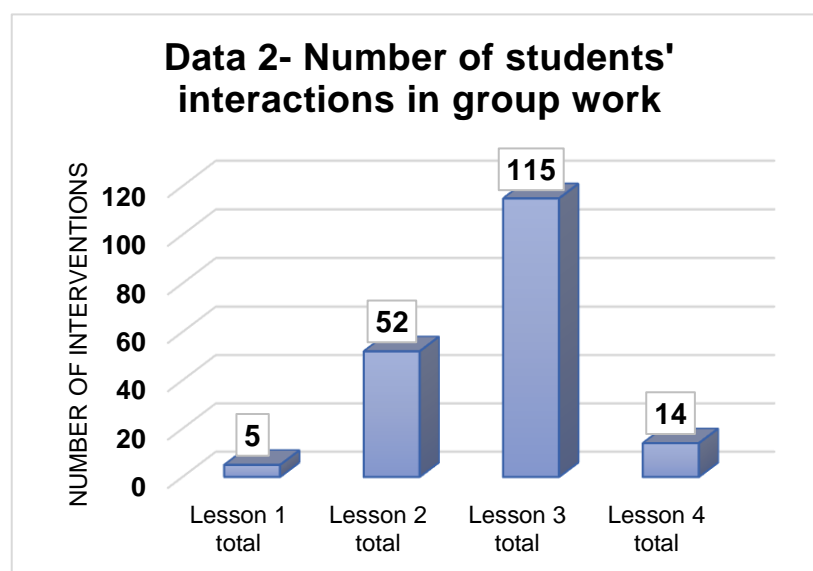


Figure 11. Student forum interactions in group activities.

With this in mind, the data from the learner's interventions was compared to the pre-test/post-test progress, presented in table 5 where the results are ordered from the learner who presented the higher progress in the post-test to the lowest. An improvement is evident between the pre-test and post-test, it is observable in table 5. This table indicates that when contrasting the number of interventions that students had in the forums with the improvement in the Post-test results, there is not a direct relationship between them. Students who had the highest number of interventions did not necessarily have the highest progress in the Post-test. For instance, student number 3 obtained the highest progress in the Post-test; however, the total of interventions in the forums was low (data 1) for this student. On the contrary, student number 6 presented a decrease of 10 points in the post-test, although that student had the highest number of forum participations (data 1). At the same time, student number 28 obtained a progress of 10 points in the Post-test score, even though, this student did not present any interventions in group

work activities (data 2). The previous findings can be attributed to the fact that when students did the group tasks at the end of each lessons, they might have just been worried about presenting it on time and with a nice layout. As a result, they might have not seen as important to understand the use of the language consciously.

Table 5.

*Students' participation in forums Vs Pre-test and post-test differences*

Student code	Pre-test results	Post-test results	Pre-test/ post-test <u>difference</u>	Data 1 Total number of forum interventions	Data 2 Number of forum interventions in collaborative tasks
1	70	80	10	21	8
2	40	50	10	5	0
3	10	60	50	8	3
4	60	60	0	17	6
6	20	10	-10	29	10
7	30	70	40	20	11
9	20	70	50	15	8
10	30	60	30	9	1
13	20	70	50	18	10
14	20	60	40	16	6
15	40	50	10	21	14
16	30	60	30	19	10
19	20	30	10	18	13
21	20	40	20	26	17
22	30	70	40	20	16
23	20	20	0	11	2
24	40	60	20	8	4
25	40	60	20	16	4
26	20	30	10	11	7
27	10	40	30	16	3
28	20	50	30	3	0
29	30	20	-10	25	16
30	20	20	0	6	1

While analyzing the role of the collaborative work online on the language students' progress, the researchers also found that during the implementations, the collaborative online learning had a particular behavior. Thus, students' artifacts demonstrated lack of interaction when collaborative tasks were required. In the same way, students' perceptions evidenced they felt uncomfortable working collaboratively since they faced difficulties related to time management, commitment, and responsibility of group members.

Finally, regarding students' perceptions of the online collaborative instructional design proposed, the researchers found that students' insights showed a positive opinion about the design implemented. For example, the Teachers' Journal showed that the number of participations students had during the pedagogical implementation was high; although when interaction was needed, most of the learners avoided to discuss with their schoolmates in the forums, making difficult to plan a collaborative task.

Finally, some large size class negative effects such as the lack of feedback for each student and the observation of the individual process of learners were minimized due to the interaction teacher-learners through the forums, the checklists assessment that the teacher gave to the groups during the development of the activities. The number of participations of students in forums and the increasing interest showed by learners in the development of the activities, demonstrated that the learners felt involved and, that probably they felt noticed by their classmates and teacher, situation that promoted higher participation and encouraged students to work on the tasks.



### **Chapter six: Conclusions**

The following chapter reports the conclusions, pedagogical implications and limitations emerged from the research process. Additionally, some recommendations for further research are suggested.

Important discernments were obtained from the data analysis process which are relevant to the research question: What is the role of a collaborative work online strategy on reading and writing foreign language skills progress in a large size English class? And the sub-question: What are students' perceptions on the online collaborative instructional design proposed for the English class?

To begin with, the role of collaborative work online on reading and writing progress in a large class was to involve students in interactional activities that permitted learners to build new knowledge by using the second language. In fact, students liked to work in group and they felt that working in such manner, encouraged them to work better and improve their learning process. This statement is coherent with to Kerr (2011), who describes the increase of learners' feeling of value when the collaborative work is present in large size educational settings. However, for learners, collaborative work online was just given to distribute responsibilities and assign specific duties into the groups. Thus, most students learned new vocabulary and information about the topics addressed by searching information from the internet and reading independently.

In addition, the role of the collaborative online strategy permitted to demonstrate a meaningful progress in writing skills more than in the reading ones. It was the result of learners working more time doing their individual writing tasks and posting information in the forums. Moreover, the input and instructions of the design guided students to write more than to read, this circumstance focused researchers to evaluate learning processes during and after the tasks and from the students' outcomes. Furthermore, it should be noted that there was reading practice during the development of the tasks, since students had to read instructions and had to understand what they were writing.

During the implementation of the collaborative work online strategy, the interaction processes were given by the exchanging of information and a set of independent statements that members of the group sent and received. As a consequence, learners experienced difficulties to manage the allocated time for presenting the tasks, make decisions in group and join meetings with others online. Thus, learners expressed negative comments concerning the collaborative work informing that time was short and people were hardly committed and responsible with the tasks. Those negative comments of lack of commitment are consistent with Kerr's statement (2011), that established that learners should be involved in their own learning to make effective the collaborative learning process.

Moreover, the collaborative learning online was demonstrated to be an interesting pedagogical possibility for teachers to deal with large size class issues. Teachers monitored students' performance in a more careful way due to the fact that most of the activities proposed in this implementation were collaboratively oriented. Likewise, Tyrou and Mikros (n.d) concluded that team work support learners and encourage them to complete the activities. Similarly, to this study, and after analyzing students' opinions regarding the online design, students mostly agreed on having had the chance to learn from others when working on the collaborative tasks. In addition, teacher gave feedback to students' performance. This process allowed students to receive assessment opportunely, and it also helped teacher to devote more attention to each learner performance by giving feedback not only with comments and corrections on the platform but through the use of checklists to assess the final tasks from each lesson.

On the other hand, there is an issue present in the large size classes regarding the way in which students can get easily distracted. After this implementation, the researchers observed that while working collaboratively online, students also got distracted with social networks or games. Therefore, teachers using this type of implementation should offer constant training on the use of the web and the internet tools for students to be more focused during their tasks development.

In regards to the sub-question, most of students' perceptions related to the instructional design were positive. Students considered the design was an attractive and innovative tool for learning a language. Indeed, the online design offered a new pedagogical tool in order to learn and practice language skills, in the specific case of this study, reading and writing. Also, it can be concluded that the topics and instructions included in the lessons helped learners to feel motivated and comfortable with the development of the tasks. The previous conclusions agree with Ho (2000) whose research describes that when in the language classroom some technological tools are involved, it increases motivation and confidence in learners. In contrast, some other students considered the lessons had things to improve. For example, the access to some tools needed for completing a task and the sometimes monotonous and mechanical way of presenting the activities.

Finally, taking into account this research was a pilot study, one of its purposes was to examine which elements from the instructional design process presented possible improvements. Those improvements are part of the iterative process belonging to the instructional design.

Hence, after the analysis, the researchers concluded that regarding the design, the number of steps proposed in each lesson should not be over three, since students can get bored

easily. Also, the instructions need to be accurate in order to avoid misinterpretations from the students, as in an online design, the teacher's presence in a platform is highly represented by the instructions. On the other hand, taking into account students experienced lots of difficulties while working collaboratively online, an important thing to adjust in a major study on this topic, is training students face to face on the collaborative learning dynamics in order to successfully transfer those dynamics into an online environment. Furthermore, having in mind, the major role of the researchers during the implementation was to monitor students' performance, the researchers identified more time needs to be devoted to involve students who might not be committed enough during the collaboration processes, in order to accompany possible problems inside the teams related to communication breakdowns or responsibility issues.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The following pedagogical considerations emerged from the whole research process:

- Collaborative work online requires participants to be trained on interaction processes that go beyond exchanging information and ideas. The fact that interaction is the tool students have to co-construct knowledge and approach their goals from different perspectives (Watkins, et. al., 2007), makes that process essential as part of learners' educational skills, allowing them to accomplish their team goals satisfactorily. Hence, a training on interaction should consider the challenges that collaborative work online has, for example, the use of computer mediated tools in order to interact, as well as interpreting the members who might not involve enough in the process, which cannot be easily seen through the online interaction (Graham & Misanchuk, 2004).

- Instructional design requires clear tasks models to guide students on how to achieve their language goals. Here, determining what model and instructions are appropriate becomes necessary in order to guarantee that students understand what they are doing and they can accomplish the proposed task.
- In online environments, learners need permanent guidance and support from the teacher along the process. In collaborative work online, the teacher must be a mediator and has to spend enough time interacting with students. In fact, the teacher should offer learners a scaffolding process to guide them through the lessons completion, mainly in the first stages of the collaborative work online.
- When having students with low language proficiency, the interactions, discussions and negotiations that happen in collaborative work online tools, such as forums, should be done in the learners' mother tongue, due to the fact that researchers observed that learners used more the translator to communicate than to create their own sentences. The use of the first language would allow to extend the discussions and enrich the experience of working in group; in addition, this strategy would give students more confidence on their learning process. In summary, students with low L2 proficiency would reach collaboration in group work if they use their mother tongue instead of using translator or inappropriate grammatical sentences to discuss.
- Improving language skills (reading and writing) requires that students receive certain learning strategies and scaffolding processes that allow them to have more consistency on the language learning process during the implementation of an online design. For that reason, a pedagogical intervention as the one displayed in this project could

include learning strategies for reading and writing that may enhance students' communicative competence.

### **Limitations**

In spite of the intervention lasted 8 weeks (two weeks for each lesson), the main limitation of this study is related to time. During the last weeks of implementation, students had different curricular and extracurricular activities that impeded the proper development of the fourth lesson in which participation of students was low and some activities were not completed. With this in mind, it would be recommended to implement a similar intervention that offers more time to develop the activities without being limited by the school terms and activities.

The second limitation refers to the students' use of Google translator in most of their discussions where the wrong use of the translator made incomprehensible what learners wanted to express. It impeded students to have a clear interaction needed for collaborative online learning. Besides, this limitation also impeded the correct use of L2; and in consequence, the proper learning of the second language.

On the other hand, there were some situations that affected the continuity of students during the implementation. This fact limited the analysis of results of this study. For example, some students changed school or class, other students did not start from the beginning of the pedagogical implementation, while others did not finish the process. For this reason, not all the students were taken into account in the results because they did not participate in all the research process.

Another limitation explains that students have not acquired the concept of group work, because they developed the group activities by assembling individual parts of work to complete

a specific task. This situation eventually resulted in losing the opportunity to create knowledge together through the discussion and reflection of individual experiences.

### **Further Research**

First, in order to have more consistent results in the language learning process, the implementation of a collaborative work online strategy should be carried out in a longer period of time. This would allow researchers to have more data of a long time implementation and its effects on second language learning.

Second, in this pilot study, students made use of Google translator for posting in the forums. However, some of those comments were impossible to understand because students do not know how to use the tool correctly. With this in mind, a suggested further research is related to provide strategies to guide learners in the correct use of translators and other Web 2.0 tools for improving a specific language skill for learning a language.

Then, researchers also consider that further research might focus on the implementation of macro strategies and micro strategies for improving reading comprehension, through a collaborative online learning setting.

Finally, this study highlights that students improved writing through an online collaborative instructional design proposed for the English class. Thus, researchers consider relevant to carry out similar studies in public schools that focus on the improvement of other skills, such as listening or speaking.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Pre-Test and Post-Test

*COLEGIO SALUDCOOP SUR*  
**THIS IS MY CITY**  
**PRE TEST**

STUDENT'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. READING**

Read the following text, then select the best answer in each question.

**This is my city: Bogotá**

Bogotá is the most important city in Colombia. It is the major city. Bogota is the largest city in the country. Bogota is located in the Andes Mountains and is colder than other major cities from Colombia. Bogotá is also the biggest commercial spot in the country, even though it is not a port.

Bogotá is a very touristic city, but it is more expensive than other touristic places in Colombia. The best view in Bogotá is from la Calera, where you can see the whole city and enjoy a hot drink called "Canelazo". Personally, I recommend you zona T for the most fun nightlife, but some others say that nightlife is better at Zona Rosa.

Make sure you visit the downtown and the museums of the city, they are cheaper than museums in other major cities in Latino America and they are the most impressive,  
It is well worth visiting Bogotá!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Where is Bogotá?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. In the port</li> <li>b. In the Andes Mountains</li> <li>c. In the commercial spot</li> </ul>  | <p>C. in Zona T</p>   |
| <p>2. What's the weather like in Bogota?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Colder than other cities in Colombia</li> <li>b. Warmer than Cartagena</li> <li>c. Colder than Calera.</li> </ul> | <p>4. What places are recommended for nightlife?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. La Calera</li> <li>b. Zona T and Zona Rosa</li> <li>c. Monserrate</li> </ul>           |
| <p>3. Where can you see a complete view of Bogotá?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. In downtown</li> <li>b. In La Calera</li> </ul>   | <p>5. What is cheaper in Bogota than in other cities from Latino America?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Nightlife</li> <li>b. museums</li> <li>c. downtown</li> </ul> |


**B. WRITING**

Write a brief description on your favorite place in Bogotá. A park, a museum, or any other place you enjoy visiting. Use simple present, adjectives and comparatives.

**Appendix B. Students' Artifacts.**


let's start with the dialogue because no?

Mostrar mensaje anterior | Editar | Dividir | Borrar | Responder

 - lunes, 14 de marzo de 2016, 21:12

but if Lets start with the part of laura we do ?


Mostrar mensaje anterior | Editar | Dividir | Borrar | Responder

 - lunes, 14 de marzo de 2016, 21:45

empezemos for us and then we look at it

we're doing?

Mostrar mensaje anterior | Editar | Dividir | Borrar | Responder

 - lunes, 14 de marzo de 2016, 21:52

Okay, so we start with ?

Mostrar mensaje anterior | Editar | Dividir | Borrar | Responder

## Appendix C - Students' Journals

### JOURNAL

Grupos separados: Todos los participantes

#### JOURNAL LESSON

Based on the results and your experience, answer the following questions:

HOW WAS MY EXPERIENCE IN THIS LESSON ?

HOW DID I FEEL WORKING IN GROUP?

WHAT DID I LEARN?

Remember to start the journal with the date.



Última edición: domingo, 20 de marzo de 2016, 23:11

HE APRENDIDO MUCHAS COSAS  
AUNQUE NO PUDE HACER LA CARICATURA POR QUE NO ENTENDI  
ME GUSTA TRABAJAR MUCHO EN GRUPO ES MUY CHEVERE PODEMOS INTERCAMBIAR IDEAS CON LAS  
DEMAS PERSONA & ELLAS CONMIGO PUEDO PREGUNTAR SI NO ENTIENDO ALGO ELLOS ME EXPLICAN Y  
TAMBIEN CUENTO CON LA EXPLICACION DE LA PROFESORA LE PODEMOS HABLAR Y ELLA NOS EXPLICA  
LO QUE NO TENGAMOS ENTENDER Y ESO ME PARECE GENIAL  
ME GUSTA RABAJAR POR ACA AUNQUE POR DISPONIBILIDAD DE TIEMPO NO HE ENTREGADO LAS  
ACTIVIDADES A TIEMPO Y ME HE RETRASADO UN POCO PERO LAS TERMINO DESPUES





Esta lección fue un poco complicada, porque el trabajo con mis compañeras en ocasiones fue un poco incomodo, pero al final pudimos resolver para enviar un buen trabajo.

Tambien he aprendido bastante en la clase, ya que puedo identificar los comparativos mucho mejor que antes, aunque el ingles no es mi fuerte, me motiva bastante estas actividades.

No me parecia muy divertida esta actividad porque fue un poco complicada, pero todas las anteriores me gustaron mucho.

## Appendix D - Teachers' Journals model.

[illegible]

## Appendix E - Teachers, And Students Checklists

### Teachers' checklist lesson 2.

HOW WELL YOU...?	VERY WELL	OK	NEED TO IMPROVE
Identify and name touristic places in Colombia and	X		
Compare some of touristic places using comparatives	X		
Follow instructions in order to complete each one of the proposal tasks and final product.	X		
Post and reply in forums and journals on time	X		
Discuss, plan and work in group online	X		
Present in group an attractive scrapbook where there is a comparison of two touristic places in Colombia.	X		

### Students' self-assessment checklist lesson 2.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: 15/03/2016 \_\_\_\_\_

	HOW WELL CAN YOU...	VERY WELL	OK	A LITTLE
1	Name and recognize vocabulary related with carnivals and celebrations in Colombia		X	
2	Identify and use adjectives in sentences to describe colombian celebrations	X		
3	Follow instructions and search information in the internet		X	
4	Manage the time and post in forums and journals on time		X	
5	Discuss, plan and work in group with others online		X	
6	Present a dialogue using the correct form of superlatives that describe carnivals and celebrations in Colombia.	X		

## Appendix F – Lesson Plans

### General Description of lessons.

General Description of lessons.		
Phase	Procedure	Product
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><b>Design of course:</b> These four lessons are intended to 8 weeks. The students will then divide into small groups for developing task by collaborative work online.</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> Students of ninth grade from Colegio Saludcoop Sur.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Learn about places from Colombia, and write short descriptions about places by using comparatives and superlatives adjectives.</p> <p><b>Identify Environment and Delivery:</b> computers with internet access</p>	
<b>Design</b>	<p>Each lesson starts by asking students what they know about places in Bogota, touristic places in Colombia, Carnivals and celebrations in Colombia. Each student is invited to answer some questions related with the topic in the forums. Students have to read and search information have some samples</p> <p>Instructions and tasks encourage students to be divided into groups, and have each group meet to discuss how to plan and design the final product. Next, groups post their products. Learners have to see others works and comment on them.</p>	
<b>Development</b>	<p><b>TOPICS:</b> Places around the city, Adjectives, Simple present structures, Agreement</p> <p><b>Materials needed for lesson:</b> Links Brainstorm:  <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit</a> </p>	
<b>Implementation</b>	<p><b>Lesson 1:</b> Students design a poster and write sentences that describe places by using more than two adjectives. Brainstorm  <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit</a> </p> <p><b>Lesson 2:</b> Learners design a scrapbook and describe and compare places in Colombia using comparatives. Prior knowledge activity <a href="http://www.purposegames.com/game/departments-of-colombia-quiz">http://www.purposegames.com/game/departments-of-colombia-quiz</a>.</p> <p><b>Lesson 3:</b> Create a comic using superlatives with simple present to describe celebrations in Colombia. Prior knowledge activity  <a href="http://www.educaplay.com/es/recursoseducativos/2096937/colombian_celebrations_.htm">http://www.educaplay.com/es/recursoseducativos/2096937/colombian_celebrations_.htm</a> </p> <p><b>Lesson 4:</b> Students write a letter inviting people to visit Colombia. 4 Guidelines for the activity  <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tfGgHnI4Zg7xWwRsb2oHBwBw-D4WqNwSbMecdMRrgOw/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tfGgHnI4Zg7xWwRsb2oHBwBw-D4WqNwSbMecdMRrgOw/edit</a> </p>	<p>Poster describing places in Bogota</p> <p>Scrapbook comparing two touristic places in Colombia</p> <p>Comic of conversations talking about the best carnivals and celebrations in Colombia</p>

		Letter inviting people to visit Colombia
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p>Journal: Students reflect on the following questions</p> <p>How did I felt in this lesson?</p> <p>What contributes to make me feel in that way (the topics, about me, my partners, my team, etc.)?</p> <p>How did I feel working in group?</p> <p>What did I learn (topics, about me, my partners, my team, etc.)?</p> <p>Checklist: HOW WELL CAN I?</p>	

### Model of lesson plan

LESSON 1: Bogota, what a beautiful city!		
Phase	Procedure	Product
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><b>Design of course:</b> This lesson is intended to 2 weeks. The students will then divide into small groups for designing a poster and work by collaborative work online.</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> Students of ninth grade from Colegio Saludcoop Sur.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> At the end of this module students of ninth grade will be able to describe places of Bogota.</p> <p><b>Identify Environment and Delivery:</b> computers with internet access.</p>	
<b>Design</b>	<p>Each lesson starts by Asking students what they know about places in Bogota, touristic places in Colombia, Carnivals and celebrations in Colombia.</p> <p>Each student is invited to answer some questions related with the topic in the forums. Students have to read and search information have some samples.</p> <p>Instructions and tasks encourage students to be divided into groups, and have each group meet to discuss how to plan and design the final product.</p> <p>Next, groups post their products. Learners have to see others works and comment on them.</p> <p>Invite students to compare the time lines to see which technological advances were included on most of them.</p>	
<b>Development</b>	<p><b>TOPICS:</b> Places around the city, Adjectives, Simple present structures, Agreement</p> <p><b>Materials needed for lesson:</b> Links Brainstorm:  <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/104g1MSUfN3Zw4HdJlwy-qpQFAZLxn_tuFGlm3VtF6ZQ/edit</a> </p>	
<b>Implementation</b>	<p><b>STEP1: BUILDING</b> The whole group completes a chart in a Google docs by naming place in Bogota, posting and adding comments.</p> <p><b>STEP 2.</b> Students choose the categories on the chart that they completed in the previous activity. They write about positive and negative aspects of three places using the adjectives in box to complete the comments.</p> <p><b>STEP 3: EXPLORING PLACES.</b> (Individually): Students choose a place from Bogota and find information on the web (videos, articles, pictures, etc.)</p>	Poster describing places in Bogotá

	<p>that answer the following questions: What place is it? Where is it?, What can you do there?, What does it look like?, What do you find interesting about this place?, Do you recommended this place? Why?</p> <p>After posting, Students find other two people that have chosen a similar place in the forum. They comment what they have in common and different.</p> <p><b>STEP 4. BOGOTA: WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CITY!</b> Groups formed in activity 3, design a poster to present the information discussed in the forum 3</p> <p><b>STEP 5: IMPROVE YOUR WORK</b> After posting the poster, three other people see task and comment on the following items</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the poster mention places according to category that was selected by the group?</li> <li>2. Does the description tell you positive things about the place?</li> <li>3. Does the group use a lot of adjective in the description of the places?</li> <li>4. Is the poster attractive?</li> <li>5. What did you learn from the poster?</li> <li>6. Do you suggest any change for the poster?</li> </ol>	
Evaluation	<p>Journal: Students reflect on the following questions: How did I felt in this lesson? What contributes to make me feel in that way (the topics, about me, my partners, my team, etc.)?,How did I feel working in group?, What did I learn (topics, about me, my partners, my team, etc.)?</p> <p>Checklist: HOW WELL CAN I?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name and recognize vocabulary related with places around the city</li> <li>2. Identify and use adjectives in sentences to describe places</li> <li>3. Follow instructions and search information in the internet</li> <li>4. Manage the time and post in forums and journals on time</li> <li>5. Discuss, plan and work in group with others online</li> <li>6. Present the poster with three descriptions of three places of Bogota by using attractive pictures, good organization, and correct writing.</li> <li>7. Had problems with the platform</li> <li>8. Develop all the activities</li> </ol>	

## Appendix G - Sample of Collaborative work activity.

### STEP 3. EXPLORING PLACES

#### 30 MINUTES

1. Choose a place from Bogota and find information on the web (videos, articles, pictures, etc.) that answer the following questions.

*Elige un lugar de Bogotá, encuentra información de este sitio en internet (videos, artículos, imágenes, etc) que dé respuesta a las siguientes preguntas:*

1. What place is it? Where is it?
2. What can you do there?
3. What does it look like?
4. What do you find interesting about this place?
5. Do you recommended this place? Why?

2. After posting, find another two people in the forum who you want to work with, to compare and discuss the places you chose.

*Después de publicar tus respuestas, encuentra dos personas en el foro. (Con quien quieras trabajar) Discute y comenta sobre el lugar que elegiste.*

**STEP 4. BOGOTA: WHAT A BEATIFUL CITY!**

STEP 4. BOGOTA: WHAT A BEATIFUL CITY!

30 MINUTES

Finally, with your friends from step 3, design a poster in WORD



where you present the information that you

discussed in the forum 3:

Open new threads to talk with your friends and plan the designing of your poster.

*Finalmente, con tus amigos que escogiste en el PASO 3, crea un poster en Word para presentar la información que discutieron en el foro 3.*

*En nuevos foros planear y discute con tus amigos el diseño del poster.*